

# The Return of Lebiticus Swoyne

A Journey Through Time, Space and Dimension that spans a  
Thousand Years

## 1 – Christmas Lost

There are dark forces at work in the world and the good in men's hearts is often betrayed by their deeds. At such times, evil can escape into the human world and take root.

Evil dwelt beneath the ocean floor, entombed for centuries, though to be trapped forever. But evil, like water, seeks its own level, and after pounding on its crypt for ages it breached the wall and evil was free.

Two long, bony, hairless arms broke through and pulled their owner out. His minions followed – some with the faces of bats and dogs, others with visages too horrible to describe. He brought them to the surface of the sea in a cocoon of poisoned air. He led them onto the shores of a gravely beach. They walked, flew and limped behind him as he stepped proudly onto the sand. At his feet was a stone cairn with an eroded plaque affixed to the side. He looked down and read the inscription carved into the stone.

“Christmas Island,” he sneered. Thin curls of blue smoke rose from his greasy purple skin. “Yes,” he mused. “Christmas Island will do very nicely.”

He spun and faced his horde of foul and rotten followers. “Here we will fashion a new moon!” he shrieked. “Here we will destroy Christmas!”

He pointed one twisted and gnarled finger at the cairn. A streak of green light shot out and shattered the cairn into dust. His laughter filled the air like a cloud of poison.

\* \* \*

Winter had come to the North Pole and the preparations for Christmas Eve were underway. Of course, the elves worked year round to get ready for Christmas, but by autumn things really began to get hectic. Yugo's snowmobile was parked in the underground parking lot, level P2 and there it would stay until spring. There was simply no time for fun and games with Christmas so near.

Iggy, Yugo and Sam were working on the assembly line that afternoon, applying polish to an endless row of mechanical trains. Yugo had been ordered not to make any modifications to the trains this year. The Christmas before he had juiced up the ramminjammers on the Sperry converters and had inadvertently caused 17 Christmas trees to burn down. No one was injured, but mysteriously, none of the high-powered trains were ever found. Some people claim they saw the trains rising through the air like rocket ships riding a column of blue green flames and exhaust. Some scientists even attributed certain failures of military surveillance satellites to the interference caused by numerous orbiting train engines. Needless to say, Yugo's inventive forays into the railway field were now necessarily restricted.

The lunch bell rang and the elves shambled out of the workshop and made their way up to the cafeteria on the 10<sup>th</sup> floor of the 24-story steel and glass Santa Claus Tower – the centre of Santa Claus' operations and which was located precisely at the North Pole.

Iggy looked out over his ham hash and corn casserole through the large picture window. The Arctic frontier spread away below them, illuminated by only that faint sunlight that appears for about an hour or two each day at that time of year.

For a moment he thought he saw a green light flash in the distance. He felt a chill rise and he shivered.

“What is it?” asked Yugo.

“I don't know,” answered Iggy, rubbing his arms. For some reason I just felt very afraid.”

“Me too,” said Sam. If we don't make our quota, we'll be polishing trains all weekend.”

\* \* \*

On Christmas Island the schemes of Leviticus Swyne were beginning to take form. It was none too soon for Swyne, having been imprisoned under the sea for over 600 years his patience had worn very thin.

The wildlife on the island had fled. In the woods behind the beach, Swyne's jabbering horde had built a massive tower. It rose beyond sight and swayed gently in the breeze. Swyne looked upon his tower and grinned. His pointed teeth cut into his lower lip and a thin trail of black blood oozed out. He reached down and picked up one of his greasy little jackals. The creature smiled at him, then Swyne threw it aside and it exploded with a puff of black smoke.

“My friends,” Swyne said, raising his arms above his head. “We are ready to begin. In biblical times ancient man built a tower to heaven to speak to God. Our tower is not near so ambitious, but with it we will speak to the whole world!”

\* \* \*

Iggy, Yugo and Sam walked into the rec room in the basement of Elves Barracks B. Sam flopped into a big leather armchair and kicked up his feet. "I'm beat," he sighed. This was certainly a fair comment, as Sam had polished a couple of hundred thousand trains since lunch.

Iggy settled into nearby chair, picked up a remote control and snapped on the 60-inch rear projection television set across the room. The set cracked to life and the familiar opening notes of the theme from *Cheers* filled the room. Sam was humming along absent-mindedly when the picture faded to black and the music stopped.

"Now what?" Sam asked to no one in particular. His question was answered a moment later when a new picture wobbled onto the screen. The focus sharpened and fixed on a truly horrible sight.

The twisted visage of Leviticus Swyne leered out of the screen. His maroon skin was mottled and blistered. A flock of greasy raven hair hung over one watery yellow eye. He rested his pointy chin on his wrist and idly scratched his cheek with one hooked talon of a finger. He looked into the screen and spoke.

"Greetings, humans. My name is Leviticus Swyne. You may call me the Anti-Claus. Your bad deeds and ill will have brought me forth. For centuries you have celebrated a barbaric little ritual that you call Christmas. Now it is time to stop. You do not need Christmas anymore." The Anti-Claus stood up and walked towards the camera. "It is time to stop giving. It is time to start taking. It is a lot cheaper, and I think that you will agree with me that it is a lot more fun. Even now my agents are moving among you to assist you in this task."

The scene shifted to a view of a dimly lit city street where a gaggle of jackals and weasels bounded and scampered up the street throwing rocks and bricks and each other through windows and scattering assorted wares in the street. Swyne's face returned to the screen. "Go forth!" he screamed. "Go now! Take whatever you want. Take it all!"

He turned away, and then looked back. "And Santa Claus, do not try to stop me. I am much more powerful than you now. You cannot hope to win again."

The Anti-Claus' face disappeared from the screen. Iggy, Yugo and Sam stared at one another.

"Whoa," said Sam. "Why does this stuff seem to happen to us every Christmas?"

"I think we had better go see the Chief," said Iggy.

\* \* \*

Under the hypnotic influence of the Anti-Claus, around the world, people had taken to the streets and taken, taken, taken. Stores were looted and the looters themselves were soon robbed.

The Anti-Claus looked out from every channel of every television in the world, exhorting people everywhere into the mob. His telecommunications system was so sophisticated it enabled him to not only broadcast into millions of homes but to look into those homes himself and issue personal directions to those who appeared reluctant or unwilling to join the throng.

Within hours the world had begun to forget Christmas and the spirit of giving that generates Christmas magic. The world began to know only the dark magic of the Anti-Claus. They forgot how to give. Now, they only knew how to take.

\* \* \*

Iggy and Sam ran out of Elves Barracks B and across the compound to the Santa Claus Tower. Along the way they stopped by the garage. Yugo was underneath his snowmobile installing a few modifications to it. This was his favourite hobby and had led his friends into more than a few misadventures.

The three of them ran into the lobby and hailed the Penthouse Express elevator. They were going to the top with this one. They burst from the elevator into the marble lobby of the penthouse. Santa Claus was sitting in his white leather armchair behind an enormous desk which looked more like an aircraft carrier than a piece of office furniture. Santa Claus was talking to suppliers on the speakerphone. He looked up and noted the frantic expressions on the elves' faces.

"Got to go, T.J.," he said and disconnected the call. "What's up boys?" he asked.

Iggy and Sam quickly explained what they had seen. Santa Claus spun in his chair and looked out the window. "Leviticus Swyne," he mumbled. "How I hoped that this day would never come."

"Who is he?" asked Iggy.

"What is he?" asked Sam.

Santa leaned forward in his chair and explained. "Leviticus Swyne is one of a band of demons that have cursed the world since time began. Every few hundred years he comes back to wreak havoc. Swyne becomes when there is evil about. This is such a time.

"Leviticus Swyne and I have locked horns too many times to count. When last we met, I thought him gone forever. I should have known that a creature like Swyne could never be destroyed while there is still evil about to call him forth.

"I last saw Swyne in Europe in the dark ages. He had taken to calling himself the Anti-Claus to mock me. He had started a plague. A wizard named Hextor put a spell on him, imprisoning him and his horde beneath the sea. Hextor claimed his spell would last a thousand years or as long as there was good in men's hearts. That was only 6 or 700 years ago. Unfortunately, there are no wizards now."

Santa sighed. “The Anti-Claus is a creature of pure evil. Everything he touches rots and wither to dust. He exists only to destroy everything about him.”

“And now he wants to destroy Christmas,” said Iggy.

“What he wants is much bigger than that. He wants to destroy the whole world. Christmas is only the beginning. You see, if you can take away Christmas and the spirit of giving, then you take away hope. Without hope, there is nothing.

“I first met Leviticus on a world that was lush and green and knew the spirit of Christmas. Leviticus came and with his horde of imps and demons he destroyed Christmas and with it, that world.” Santa looked out the window at a full moon, which filled the northern sky. “For what is a world without Christmas. It is as barren and lifeless as a moon.”

Iggy, Yugo and Sam all looked at each other. Suddenly, the television set on the end of Santa’s desk snapped on. The face of the Anti-Claus beamed out and smirked.

“There you are, Nicholas. It is good to see you again.”

“What do you want, Swyne?”

The Anti-Claus threw back his head and laughed. “I want to fashion another moon. A new moon. You can’t stop me this time. I am much more powerful than you now. I control their television sets and with that, I control their minds. This pitiful race of humans is but puppets to me. Soon they will all be jabbering jackals yapping at my heels.” He pointed to one of his minions. Black fire shot from his fingers and the little demon was blasted to ash.

The Anti-Claus turned back to look at Santa Claus. “This world is mine, now. You can take your Christmas somewhere else.” The picture faded to a white dot and the room echoed with the laughter of the Anti-Claus.

\* \* \*

Santa Claus stood up and placed his red fur toque on his head. “We’ve got to stop him, boys.” He led the elves to the elevator which brought them down to the garage where Yugo kept his snowmobile and his other tools and electronic gadgets.

“First we are going to have to find him,” said Yugo, taking a seat at his desk and switching on the *Supertron Mark VI* 8 Gigabit computer, with colour monitor, radar and dolby stereo surround sound. “That transmission system he is using is broadcasting on thousands of frequencies. Its power output must be phenomenal. We should be able to locate it through *SantaSat I*.”

*SantaSat I* was a sophisticated satellite that Yugo had designed and launched that spring. It greatly assisted Santa Claus in monitoring the behaviour of millions of

boys and girls worldwide. Never before had it been more true that He sees you while you're sleeping and knows when you're awake.

Yugo tapped a few commands into the *Supertron Mark VI*. A picture of the world mapped on a globe appeared and began slowly rotating. "This is the view from *SantaSat I*," explained Yugo. "I'll just type in a few commands to monitor and identify major broadcasting sources."

In a moment a few faint yellow dots appeared at various points on the globe correlating for the most part with major cities. They watched for a while as the globe slowly rotated and new dots appeared. "None of these points seems strong enough to be the Anti-Claus' transmission source," said Yugo.

Suddenly the screen turned to snow. Yugo typed in some new commands and spun a few dials but the picture did not improve.

"What's going on?" asked Iggy. "Is he interfering with our signal?"

"I don't think so," said Yugo, his face turning a little red. "I think we are getting some mechanical train interference."

Sam slapped his forehead with his palm. Since this stung quite a bit, he decided to slap the computer monitor instead. The moment he struck the screen the picture cleared up. They were now looking at a view of Earth dominated by the Pacific Ocean. At virtually the centre was a brilliant glowing yellow spot.

"That must be it," said Yugo.

"It's in the middle of the ocean. There won't be anything there but fish!" cried Sam.

Yugo zoomed in on the spot. The picture on the screen changed to a close up map of the Pacific Ocean. The dot was a ways south of Hawaii near the Equator. As the picture zoomed closer a small island appeared. Yugo typed in another command and the words 'Christmas Island' appeared on the screen.

"Christmas Island. I should have expected that," said Santa Claus. He walked over to the snowmobile. "Let's go get him."

\* \* \*

The schemes of the Anti-Claus gained momentum.

Leviticus Swyne sat in his broadcast booth and giggled. "These humans are nothing more than cattle. They will do anything their televisions ask them too. At this rate I will have a new moon by the weekend!"

These were some of the only truthful words the Anti-Claus had spoken in his millennia long existence. Throughout the world, people were stealing from their friends and neighbours. Some had even begun to take on the physical

characteristics of the Anti-Claus' followers. They ran hunched over, dragging their knuckles in the street. Others took on more radical forms: their hair grew on their faces and bodies and they took on the appearance of bats and other wild animals.

The Anti-Claus leaned into the microphone in his broadcast centre. "Pitiful humans," he called out in his shrill voice. "Take heed. You must now complete your transformation and join with me. You have learned to take. Now look around you ... and destroy!"

\* \* \*

"Can't you go any faster?" asked Santa Claus. "We've not a moment to lose!"

"I'm going as fast as I can," replied Yugo. I can give you Mach 2, but I can't guarantee it will last for long. The snowmobile streaked south across the Pacific Ocean. They were travelling to an entirely different environment than the North Pole. Christmas Island was located in the tropics. It was covered with lush foliage and bathed in gentle ocean breezes. Nonetheless, all the elves feared that they were headed to a place far colder and crueller than any midnight blizzard at the North Pole.

Yugo's snowmobile could fly, of course. Over the years, Yugo had modified it so that it was much more than an ordinary snowmobile. It had an enclosed cab for passengers, extendable wings and a rocket engine that allowed it to travel much faster than the speed of sound. There was virtually no terrain it could not travel over, or under. With the flip of a switch it could be converted to a submarine. It could even travel through time. Yugo had been reluctant to use this feature since his last experiment in time travel had taken him to the very first Christmas Eve and he nearly wound up as a circus freak, but it was available if the need arose.

They approached Christmas Island and Yugo descended slowly. He pulled a yellow lever and two inflatable pontoons sprang out from beneath the snowmobile. It touched down gently and skimmed across the ocean surface. A few moments later Yugo guided the snowmobile onto the beach. He retracted the pontoons. The snowmobile rolled across the sand on its six snowbuster radial all terrain tires.

Moments after the snowmobile reached the beach, a dozen greasy demons fell upon it. They pounded on the roof and scratched at the windows. It was only a matter of moments before they broke in and laid their foul claws on the noble Claus.

"Raise the deflector shields!" shouted Sam.

"There are no deflector shields," said Yugo sheepishly.

"Oh honestly. What is the point?" asked Sam. "It's just like you to build an amphibious-supersonic-rocket-powered-aerial-time-travelling snowmobile without a deflector shield."

"Knock it off you two," interjected Iggy. "We've got to figure out how to get out of this mess."

Yugo reached out and pressed a flashing green button. Nothing happened for a moment and then the demons leapt away from the snowmobile in agony.

“What did you do?” asked Santa Claus.

“I turned the outside temperature up to 1000 degrees Celsius. I baked them off,” explained Yugo.

“Why would somebody build a snowmobile that can fry an egg and not put in any deflector shields?” muttered Sam, but nobody was listening.

Yugo drove the snowmobile into a large clearing in the woods. He stopped at the base of a colossal broadcast tower. A thick electromagnetic hum filled the air. There was a small cement bunker at the bottom of the tower.

“That’s where he is,” said Santa Claus, “let’s flush him out!”

Yugo pressed a black toggle switch and the snowmobile’s doors opened on silent hydraulics. Santa Claus and the elves stepped out. They walked over and knocked on the door. No one answered. Then the door blew off of its hinges and sailed across the island. The elves fell to the ground. Iggy looked into the bunker and saw that it was filled with flames. Even so, a cold draught blew out from the doorway.

Then a dark shadow filled the door and the Anti-Claus stepped out into the sunlight. He was tall and emaciated. His skin was a deep purple and covered with sores. He had thin dark hair that hung in his yellow eyes. He grinned a sepulchrous smile and stretched his wide black leather wings.

“Nicholas,” he called. “How nice to see you again.”

“I can’t say that the feeling is mutual,” grunted Santa Claus.

The Anti-Claus bent over and picked a flower from a nearby bush. The blossom instantly withered into a black smouldering twig. He laughed and turned on Santa Claus. “Go home Nicholas,” he said softly. “You can not hope to stop me. I am so much more powerful than you now. This whole world is already mine. The people of Earth bow to me. They serve me. Go home while you still can.”

“Never,” replied Santa Claus.

“Very well,” sighed the Anti-Claus. “Then I shall have to destroy you.”

“No!” shouted Sam.

The Anti-Claus looked over at the elves. “You have no wizard to save you this time. Just these children.” He looked back at Santa Claus. “This is going to hurt so bad,” he sneered. He raised his arms into the air and black flames shot from his fingertips at Santa Claus.

Santa Claus raised his hands to meet the flames. Thousands of tiny sparkles of light flowed out and met the black fire. "That's Christmas magic," whispered Iggy. "That will put him in his place."

But the Christmas magic did not put the Anti-Claus in his place. Christmas magic draws its power from all the people of the world. The Anti-Claus had hardened their hearts to the point where Santa Claus' magic was no match for the swirling black flames that surrounded him. Indeed, the black fire overwhelmed the shimmering sparkles of Christmas magic and licked at Santa Claus' robe.

"Your magic is weak, old man. There is no hope left in the world. I've seen to that!" boasted the Anti-Claus. "Soon I shall rule the world. It is my destiny."

The Anti-Claus seemed to be growing. The flames poured out of his hands. The fire thickened around Santa Claus and he disappeared from view. "And now, old man," the Anti-Claus shrieked, "you will die!" Blue lightning crackled around the two combatants. Then the Anti-Claus threw his head back and laughed.

"Ho ho ho, Santa Claus, Merry Christmas!" The smoke drifted away from Santa Claus. He was encased in a block of translucent black ice.

The Anti-Claus raised his fist in the air and shouted, "today Christmas, tomorrow the world!" He turned towards the elves. "Just three loose ends to tidy up."

The elves raced back to the snowmobile. The Anti-Claus pointed at them and the black fire speared forth. Iggy, Yugo and Sam tumbled into the snowmobile and closed the doors just as it was engulfed in flames.

"It's getting cold in here," said Sam.

Yugo checked the dashboard thermometer. "It's approaching absolute zero out there. We can't withstand this for long." He engaged the exterior heater but the temperature outside continued to fall.

"What are we going to do?" asked Iggy.

"I have an idea," said Yugo. He pulled the cover off a small keyboard and typed the following sequence of numbers: '12241350.' He reached over and turned a key under the words 'Initiate Time Travel Sequence'. Although ebony flames surrounded the snowmobile, there was a flash of white light and a moment later the blackness was gone.

## 2 – Christmas Past

The snowmobile was resting in a lush tropical forest. There was no sign of the Anti-Claus or any of his mischief.

“What happened?” asked Sam.

“We travelled back in time, I couldn’t think of any other way out,” said Yugo. “It’s December 24, 1350.”

“Why 1350?” asked Iggy.

“I’m hoping that we can find some help here. Santa Claus told us a wizard named Hextor locked the Anti-Claus under the sea. If we can find him and bring him back to Christmas Island, we might have a chance.”

“Some chance,” said Sam. “Why don’t we just settle down and sell bubonic plague tonic?”

“The plague is over. According to my calculations, Santa Claus and Hextor just defeated the Anti-Claus in this time,” said Yugo.

“I hope that he is up for doing it again,” said Iggy.

“Me too,” said Yugo. He launched the snowmobile into the sky and pointed it towards Europe.

“Hmmm,” said Sam. “Sure is a sunny day for the dark ages.”

\* \* \*

It was raining in the tiny kingdom of Gillihad when Iggy, Yugo and Sam arrived. Yugo parked the snowmobile in a copse of trees outside the city walls and initiated the security sequence. Any interlopers who tried to remove or damage the snowmobile would suffer an electric shock that would curl their hair and their toes. The elves rubbed mud on their colourful uniforms so that they would fit in with the peasants. Together they walked into the city and began their search for Hextor.

They reached a public area where a gypsy was standing on a block and making a series of predictions to a captivated crowd. Sam walked up to a member of the audience and pulled on his grubby jacket. “Excuse me,” he said, “we’re looking for a wizard named Hextor.”

“Shhh!” shhhd the peasant.

Sam tried with a few others with the same result. He looked up at the gypsy who was prophesying the end of the world in the coming weeks.

“What dross,” Sam muttered and stepped up to the block. He pushed the gypsy aside and began speaking. “Listen to me. This guy has it all wrong. The world is not going to end, at least not anytime soon. Pretty soon you are going to discover the world is round and sail in giant ships to a continent across the ocean.”

“He’s daft,” shouted one of the peasants in the crowd.

“Fruiter than a nut cake,” commented a hag with no teeth.

Sam yelled over the murmuring crowd. “I’m looking for a wizard named Hextor. It’s very important.”

An old fishwife looked up at Sam and said, “there’s a soothsayer named Hextor who lives in a cottage outside of town.”

“Soothsayer. That’s probably my man,” said Sam. He stepped down from the block. “Thanks, you’ve all been great.” He joined the other elves and they walked through the mud and slop to the city walls.

“This is abominable,” declared Iggy. “Look at these poor wretches. There is no sewage or sanitation. There must be something we can do to improve their lot.”

Yugo waved his finger in Iggy’s face. “We must do no such thing. Anything you do now can have disastrous consequences in the future. Let’s get moving before we do anything that might change history. We’ve got to find that wizard and get out of here as quickly as possible.”

They slogged their way to the edge of town and found a beaten gravel trail that led past a sign reading “Soothsayer – 1 League.”

“This must be the way,” said Iggy. Outside the city, the trail improved. It was still muddy, but there was no garbage or sewage to watch out for. A bedraggled dog passed by and sniffed at Iggy’s feet. Iggy slipped it a small chocolate bar without Yugo noticing. He hoped it would not change the course of history too much.

About ten minutes later they came to a rundown cottage made of poorly fitted stones with a thatched roof that was worn through in places. A young boy sat on the front step crying softly. Iggy jogged over to him.

The boy explained to Iggy that the following day was Christmas and the family had placed their gifts for each other in a corner of their rundown shack. But the rain was starting to pour through their roof and it looked as though the presents, and Christmas, would be ruined.

“I don’t care what you say, Yugo,” said Sam. “We are Christmas elves and we cannot just walk by this time.” Sam walked out into the adjacent field and picked up a small Scotch pine tree that had been uprooted. “All these people need is a proper Christmas tree,” he exclaimed smugly. With that, Sam marched into the shack and set his tree in the midst of the damp and soggy presents. The tree acted as an umbrella and deflected the rain away. Sam stood back and grinned.

“Oh how charming,” said the boy’s mother. “But what is it?”

“It’s a Christmas tree,” shrugged Sam.

“Can we decorate it, Mother,” asked the boy.

“Of course,” his mother replied. She remarked to Sam, “what a quaint notion. Decorating a tree at Christmas time. I shall have to tell all of our friends. She called to her husband, “Henry! Come and see the Christmas tree!”

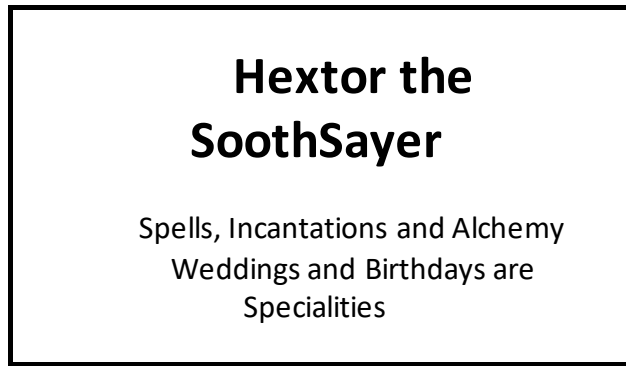
Yugo pulled Sam by the ear. “Do you see what you have done?” he whispered harshly. “These people had never heard of Christmas trees before we arrived. Now everyone is going to want one. They will be everywhere!”

Iggy put his arm around Yugo. “Yes, it looks like Sam has made a little history. The very first Christmas tree.” The family had gathered around the tree and were placing plums and oranges in its branches. One family member hid a pickle on a lower bough. “I think it is a very good idea.”

Yugo was at a loss for words. Finally he muttered, “I hate these paradoxes. Let’s get out of here before we cause any more trouble.” Iggy and Sam grinned at each other and followed Yugo out the door.

\* \* \*

Soon they reached the soothsayer’s cottage. There was a sign above the door written in Old English<sup>1</sup> script that read:



“This must be the place,” said Iggy. He knocked on the door. It was ajar and swung slowly open. The elves stepped cautiously inside. “Hello?” called Iggy.

There was a tremendous bang and the little cottage was filled with black smoke. The elves groped their way back outside. A wrinkled gnome in a blue robe followed them outside.

“I am going to have to do something about that burglar alarm,” coughed the little man.

“Are you Hextor?” asked Iggy.

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<sup>1</sup> Of course, at the time this type of script was referred to as “New English”.

“What does the sign on the door say?” the little man replied grumpily. “Of course I’m Hextor. Now what do you want, I’m a very busy man. I am trying to turn some lead into gold, so I can buy a proper house.”

“Save yourself some time,” said Yugo. “It can’t be done without an atom accelerator, and I doubt that you have one of those.”

“We need your help to banish a demon named Leviticus Swyne,” said Iggy.

Hextor laughed. “The Anti-Claus? You boys are too late. I just banished him a couple of weeks ago. He won’t resurface for another thousand years and I doubt that you chaps care too much about that.”

Iggy explained that they cared very much indeed about when and how the Anti-Claus would return having just been there and witnessing the effects of his mischief. At first Hextor was sceptical but once Yugo explained the quantum dynamics involved in time travel, he nodded slowly.

“Yes, I think I see your point,” he said. He went on to describe some technical improvements that even Yugo had difficulty understanding.

“I’m astonished that my spell lasted less than 700 years,” said Hextor. “You must truly live in grim times for the Anti-Claus to have escaped so soon. It is the good in the nature of man that gives the spell its strength.”

“I blame it on rap music,” said Sam.

“We shall have to use something stronger this time,” said Hextor. He returned to his cottage and mixed a number of potions and animal parts in a large cauldron. The pot bubbled and flashed as Hextor waved his hands over it.

Sam looked at his watch impatiently. “How long is this going to take?” he asked. “The Anti-Claus has probably taken over the whole world by now.”

Yugo placed his hand on Sam’s shoulder and chuckled. “Sam, we have a time machine. We will return to Christmas Island the moment we left it.”

“Oh,” said Sam.

Hextor poured his potion into a gourd, picked up a blue pointy hat and joined the elves. “I’m ready to go. You just have to get me close enough to the Anti-Claus to pour this concoction on him and invoke the spell.”

“How do you invoke the spell?” asked Iggy.

“A simple incantation,” said Hextor. “Just say the phrase *Ad Lunum Vadis* three times, sit back and watch the fireworks.”

“What will happen,” asked Sam.

“You will just have to wait and see,” said Hextor with a twinkle in his eye.

“That is the one thing I hate about Christmas,” Sam snorted. “I always have to wait.”

### 3 – Christmas Present

Hextor joined them, of course. They found the snowmobile, untouched, where they had left it. They climbed in and Yugo fired up the rocket engines. As they approached Christmas Island, Yugo reset the time travel sequence. "I've programmed it to transport us to the same time that we left. As soon as I flip the switch we will be back in our own time." They flew over the beach and Yugo flipped the switch. There was a bright flash and they were back.

The island was just as they had left it, with an enormous transmission tower rising from the centre. They could see where Santa Claus had been encased in black ice. Another block of ice stood nearby and the Anti-Claus was peering into it.

"He is trying to figure out where we went," said Iggy.

"He is about to find out," said Yugo. He pulled a blue lever and two chrome cannons flipped out from the sides of the snowmobile. Yugo pressed two red buttons on the steering wheel. Parallel laser beams shot out of the cannons at the Anti-Claus.



"Whoa," said Sam. "When did you install the laser cannons?"

"It's a prototype for a new kind of action figure I have been working on. I have been trying to convince Santa that every line of action figures needs an advanced weapons system as part of its accessories, but he just won't believe me."

The laser beams struck the Anti-Claus square in the chest and threw him across the clearing. He looked back at the snowmobile and grinned. "You are very elusive," he snarled. "We will finish this fight in the air!"

He spread his black wings and flew up in to the sky. Yugo punched the laser beams a second time. This time the Anti-Claus saw it coming and easily dodged the blast. The snowmobile zipped by him like a frustrated bull chasing a matador. The Anti-Claus held out his hand and a black bolt of lightning took shape in his grip. He pulled his arm back and threw the bolt at the snowmobile.

Yugo pulled the steering wheel hard to the left. The snowmobile dipped crazily and the bolt flew past. Yugo turned the snowmobile and fired again. This time the laser beam clipped one of the wings of the Anti-Claus. He howled in pain and cast another lightning bolt at the snowmobile.

This time the bolt connected. There was a mean metal tearing noise and the snowmobile began a slow spiral to the ground. "We're going down," Yugo grunted through gritted teeth.

"We're doomed!" Sam cried.

"It's okay," said Yugo. "I have a plan." He turned to Hextor. "Pour that potion in the little tank behind you." Hextor did as he was instructed. Yugo brought the snowmobile to a rough landing on the shore. The Anti-Claus gently winged down beside it.

"Come out, little elves," he called. "Come out and die!"

Yugo hit a blue button. A small door opened at the front of the snowmobile and a little nozzle stuck out. The potion sprayed from the nozzle, coating the Anti-Claus.

"Yee-Haw!" yelled Sam.

The Anti-Claus put his hands to his face and wiped his eyes. Steam was rising from his burgundy skin. He leaned forward and stepped towards the snowmobile. "What is this?" he yelled.

Yugo spun a dial and the sunroof on the snowmobile slid open. Hextor stood up on his seat and poked his head through the opening. The Anti-Claus staggered backwards when he saw Hextor. "H-how ... ?" he gasped.

Hextor waved his arm at the Anti-Claus and spoke boldly, "*Ad Lunam Vadis!*"

The Anti-Claus yelped in pain. "*Ad Lunum Vadis!*" Hextor called again.

The Anti-Claus recoiled in agony. Before Hextor could speak again, the Anti-Claus waved his arm and Hextor's mouth was suddenly filled with a thick blob of black goo. Hextor tried to speak, but with a mouthful of tar he could not make a sound, not even a whimper. He tried to pull out the goo but his hands became hopelessly stuck.

Yugo opened the door of the snowmobile and stepped out. He began to speak, but with a gesture, the Anti-Claus filled his mouth with goo as well. The Anti-Claus walked to the front of the snowmobile and raised his hand.

Sam reached forward and pressed down on the accelerator. The snowmobile lurched forward and knocked the Anti-Claus down. Sam kicked open his door and tumbled onto the sand. The Anti-Claus picked up the snowmobile and threw it into the ocean. It began to slowly sink. Iggy kicked open his door, pulled Hextor out and

swam towards the beach. The snowmobile bobbed for a few moments and then disappeared beneath the waves forever.

Sam dove into the bushes and disappeared. Iggy and Hextor crawled slowly onto the beach. A team of the Anti-Claus' demons rounded up Iggy, Yugo and Hextor and led them into the clearing.

"A very noble effort," said the Anti-Claus. "But ultimately a futile one. You are far too late. My victory is complete. This world, this future moon, is mine."

Meanwhile, Sam stumbled through the woods in a blind panic. Santa Claus was frozen in a block of ice. Iggy, Yugo and Hextor were captured. All was lost.

He fell into the clearing with tears in his eyes. He looked up and saw the Anti-Claus' broadcast bunker and smiled. Perhaps all was not lost at that. He ran into the bunker. Along one wall was a wide control board with countless dials and monitors. "I wish Yugo was here," he thought.

He flipped a switch that read 'Broadcast All Frequencies'. He leaned forward and switched on the microphone. A squall of feedback rang out from the speakers and monitors scattered around the island.

"Hey Swyne breath," said Sam. His voice echoed around the island and across the world. The Anti-Claus turned and ran to the bunker. He had almost reached the door when Sam shouted, "*Ad Lunum Vadis!*"

As soon as Sam completed the incantation, the Anti-Claus froze. A cloud of blue smoke swirled around him. He began to rise into the sky. "No, not again," he pleaded.

He rose faster and faster into the air on a column of blue smoke. Soon he disappeared from sight all together. In the night sky the full moon went black for a moment and then glowed pure white again.

\* \* \*

Once the Anti-Claus disappeared, his magic began to fade. His followers began to revert to human form. The tar in Hextor and Yugo's mouths dissolved. The block of ice that surrounded Santa Claus melted away.

Sam left the bunker and met the others in the clearing. Hextor explained that his new spell was more potent than the last and had buried the Anti-Claus in the centre of the moon. "He wanted a moon, and now he has one all to himself," said Hextor. "Even if he escapes from there, he will never come back."

"I wouldn't be so sure," said Santa Claus. "So long as there is bad will in the world, the Anti-Claus can rise again. Now, let's go see if we can fish out that snowmobile and get home."

“I’m sorry Hextor,” said Yugo. “You may have to stay here quite a while until we can get the time machine repaired.

“Oh that’s okay,” said Hextor. “You need more wizards and magicians in your world. I think I’ll enjoy hanging around for a while.

## 4 - Christmas Future

Iggy, Yugo and Sam wandered out to the beach to see if they could retrieve the sunken snowmobile. The gentle lapping of the waves on the shore was broken by a loud pop. They turned and saw that a large polished copper box had appeared on the beach. Two sliding doors on one side of the box opened quietly and a tall man in a silver jumpsuit stepped out. The man wore sunglasses, a satin scarf and a red baseball cap with shiny silver wings on the sides.

“Who is this space cadet?” Sam whispered to Iggy.

The tall man pulled an electronic device from his pocket and stared hard at it. He looked up and asked, “Are you Hextor?”

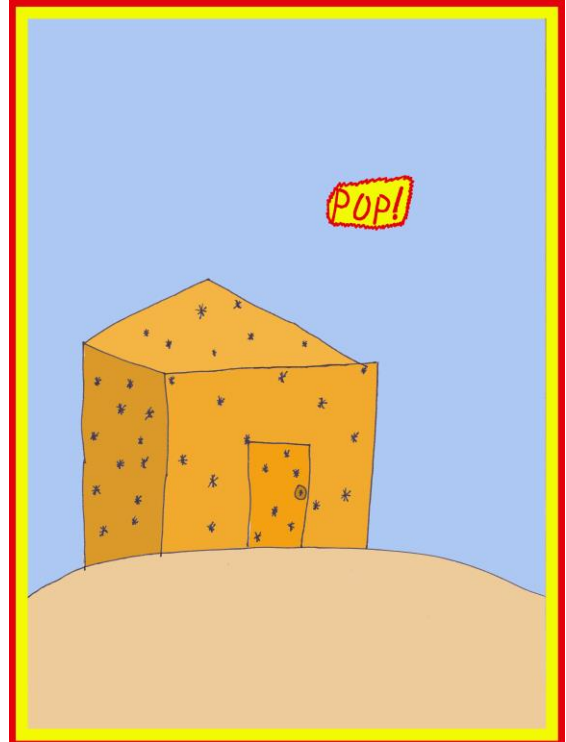
The wizard took a step back.

“Forgive me,” said the tall man. “I have not introduced myself. I am Commander Peevey of Star Patrol.” He looked over to the elves. “You must be Iggy, Yugo and Sam. Our historians suggested that you might be here as well. Hextor, you must come with me. The world is in great need of you once again.”

“Oh bother,” said Hextor. “I already saved the world today. I am really rather tired.”

“I’m afraid we simply cannot wait,” said Commander Peevey. “I must insist that you come with me now.” With that, he took Hextor by the arm and led him into the big copper box.

“Hey, where do you think you’re going with our wizard?” shouted Sam. He ran after Commander Peevey. Iggy and Yugo exchanged a look and ran after Sam. The elves reached the box a moment after Commander Peevey and Hextor leapt in as the doors slid shut. There was another tremendous pop. The box disappeared and the beach was still, disturbed only by the lapping of the waves.



The doors of the copper box slid open. The Commander led Hextor and the elves into a spacious round room. The walls were covered with digital displays and control panels. Hextor wagged his finger at Commander Peevey and said; “now young fellow, perhaps you will explain where we are and what we are doing here.”

“Of course. You are on the main bridge of the Starship *Asimov*. We are en route to planet Earth.”

“We were already on planet Earth,” said Sam.

Commander Peevey ignored Sam and looked at his watch. “This is the year is 2488.”

“What?” said Iggy and Yugo together. Sam just fainted.

Commander Peevey explained, “I was sent by Star Patrol in the time-space transportation booth to bring Hextor the wizard to our time. I am sorry to have hurried you, but the booth can only maintain its integrity in your time for a few minutes.”

“So, why are we here?” asked Hextor.

A pained look crossed the Commander’s face. “The Anti-Claus has returned. Our research has shown that Hextor is the only person in any time with the power to stop him.”

Hextor was startled. “2488? That’s less than 500 years. My spell should have lasted ten thousand years.”

Commander Peevey walked across the bridge. “It may well have. However, things have changed a great deal in the last 500 years. A mining crew on Moon Base 6 accidentally unearthed the Anti-Claus.”

“Wow,” said Iggy. “If he gets control of all the televisions again he could take over the universe!”

Commander Peevey chuckled. “Fortunately, mankind gave up on television as a big waste of time three or four hundred years ago.”

“So, what is he up to then?” asked Yugo.

“Something far more insidious than his last plot, I am afraid,” said Commander Peevey. “Once freed of Hextor’s spell, the Anti-Claus commandeered a space shuttle. Our scanners show that even now he is on his way to Earth. Today is Christmas Eve. We believe he is going directly to the North Pole. The damage he could do once he gets there is unimaginable.”

The Anti-Claus downshifted his stolen Mercury Bronto IV Shuttlecraft in preparation for entry into the Earth's atmosphere. He cackled softly to himself. What fools these humans were to have dug him out of his perfect little prison. Now his revenge would be complete.

"My last scheme was much too subtle. If one really wants to destroy Christmas, one must go directly to the source!"

The shuttle knifed through the atmosphere and the Anti-Claus descended to the North Pole. He lowered the landing gear and guided the shuttle to a rough but serviceable stop on the icy ground. He stepped out of the shuttle, stretched his wings and walked over to a low building. He stood by the door and sniffed the air. Smiling, he reached for the door. The wood rotted and withered at his touch. He kicked the remains of the door open and stepped inside.

The low building was the Loading and Shipping Centre. All of the toys built by the elves that year had been brought down to this warehouse and placed in large red and green sacks, which were lined up at the back of the building. From there, the sacks were carefully lowered into the back of Santa's great sleigh.

The group of elves charged with loading the sleigh turned at the Anti-Claus' entrance. "Ho ho ho boys, Merry Christmas," sneered the Anti-Claus. He walked to the front of the sleigh where he found Santa Claus rubbing down his lead reindeer in preparation for the long flight ahead.

Santa Claus took a step back. "You ... " he stammered.

"Well hello Nicholas," said the Anti-Claus with a sly grin. "I'm back!"

\* \* \*

Commander Peevey led the elves and Hextor into Shuttle Bay 12. "The starship is too big to land," said Commander Peevey. "We will continue our pursuit in this re-entry vehicle. It's a new model; with a twin ion drive powered by a lithium fusion reactor. It's just like riding a high speed elevator to the Earth."

They strapped themselves into the shuttle's thick plush chairs and Commander Peevey launched it towards the Earth. Sam put his hands over his ears and complained, "this is just like a high speed elevator – my ears are popping!" Yugo passed him a stick of gum.

Iggy looked out the window as the Earth grew from a tiny ball until it filled the window. They passed through a grey brown mist and the North Pole itself came into view. Some of the buildings were familiar; the elves barracks and the Loading and Shipping Centre seemed much the same, but a lot of things had changed. The Santa Claus Tower now rose over 70 stories into the air and looked to be built of seamless white porcelain. Numerous new buildings were also scattered about, each built with impossible angles and curves. Santa's operation had grown considerably in the nearly 500 years that Iggy had been away.

The re-entry vehicle touched down gently in front of the new Santa Claus Tower. They all stepped out. "Let's head over to the Loading and Shipping Centre," said Iggy. "That's where Santa Claus will be on Christmas Eve."

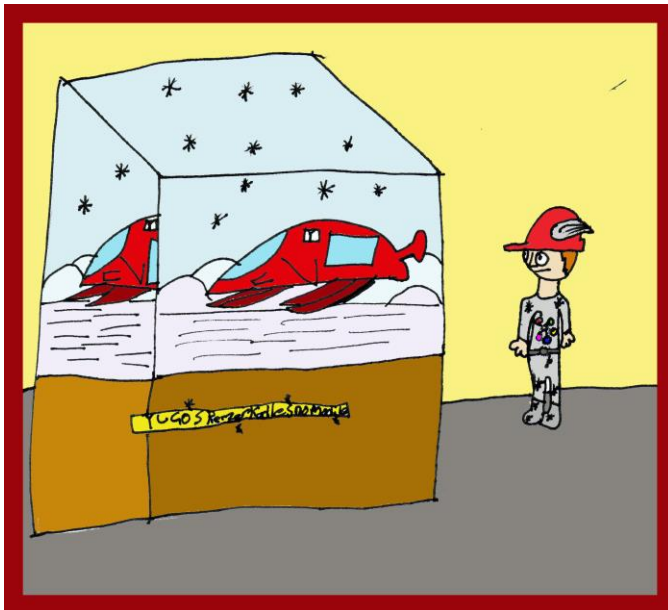
It was strangely quiet for a Christmas Eve, thought Iggy as they stepped into the Santa Claus Tower and made their way to the underground walkway that led to the Loading and Shipping Centre. The lobby of the Tower had been converted into a museum filled with objects and artefacts from countless Christmases past. The elves walked slowly past the numerous displays, some of which contained truly ancient items, and others objects from Christmases, which for Iggy, Yugo and Sam were yet to come.

It was very disorienting to find oneself in the future, with no knowledge of the history and traditions of the past 500 years. Iggy felt that he might as well be on another planet. Then he saw something that made him feel entirely at home again. "Yugo, come look at this," he called.

Yugo and Sam joined Iggy in front of a large glass cabinet. Inside, mounted on a bank of artificial snow, was a familiar snowmobile. A small silver plaque on the glass read:

**YUGO'S REMARKABLE SNOWMOBILE**

It looks like you managed to fish it out of the ocean and fix it up after all," laughed Iggy. Yugo took some comfort from this discovery. He was secretly concerned that the damage caused by the Anti-Claus combined with the seawater would have rendered the snowmobile irreparable.



"Come along," said the Commander. "Enough lollygagging. We are here on a mission. Let us find Santa Claus and warn him."

They entered the tunnel that led to the Loading and Shipping Centre. When they arrived, Santa was nowhere to be seen. Then they looked up and saw him, together with perhaps thirty elves, hanging from the ceiling in green bags. Iggy and Yugo quickly lowered them to the ground.

Santa Claus stepped from his bag and blinked at Iggy. "Ho ho ho," he laughed. "This is certainly a day for surprises. It's good to see you again boys." He embraced the elves warmly.

Commander Peevey stepped forward and extended his hand. "Good evening sir. Peevey of Star Patrol."

"Good to meet you, Commander," said Santa Claus. "Of course your reputation precedes you."

The Commander nodded humbly. "Sir, I am afraid that we have some bad news"

"I know," Santa Claus interrupted. "Leviticus Swyne, the Anti-Claus has returned. He left here about five minutes ago. He's taken my sleigh, eight tiny reindeer and all of the Christmas toys. You know Commander, with the state of the world these days, this could be the end of Christmas."

"We've got to stop him," said Iggy

"But how?" asked Santa Claus. "There is only one sleigh. With the head start he has, there will be no way to find him."

Yugo spoke up. "Follow me." He motioned to Iggy and Sam and ran back through the tunnel and into the museum. Hextor and Commander Peevey followed. He stopped in front of the cabinet where the snowmobile was displayed. He pulled a hammer from his tool-belt and smashed the glass.

"What are you doing?" gasped Sam. "This is stealing!"

"No, it's not," said Yugo, slipping behind the steering wheel. "This is my snowmobile. It says so on the cabinet."

Iggy nodded and joined Yugo. Hextor, Sam and Commander Peevey slid in behind them. It was a tight fit, but they made it. Yugo powered up the frammingaster and slid the snowmobile into gear. It lurched forward sluggishly and stalled.

"We had better let it warm up for a moment. It hasn't been driven in quite a while," said Yugo. He revved the engine a few times. Finally he smiled and eased the snowmobile out into the lobby and onto the plaza in front of the Santa Claus Tower. Yugo looked at the dashboard. There were a number of controls and monitors, which he did not recognize. It was apparent that there were many modifications and improvements that he would one day make but which he presently knew nothing about.

"Oh well," he sighed and flipped a red toggle switch. Two retro-rockets underneath the snowmobile fired and it rose slowly into the air. Yugo pushed a blue button and a pair of red wings unfolded. He punched the accelerator and the snowmobile shot forward. He guided it south, which of course is the only direction that he could go from the North Pole.

He turned on the radar screen and scanned it for signs of any other airborne object. "Now we just have to find the Anti-Claus," he murmured.

“Sure,” said Sam. “But then what?”

\* \* \*

The Anti-Claus stood at the head of Santa Claus’ sleigh and whipped on the reindeer. He sang:

On Dasher, On Dancer, On Comet, On Cupid  
Let’s show the world that Christmas is stupid.

The sleigh travelled south through a dense cloud of grey smoke. Below him the Anti-Claus could barely make out the lights of a great city, which spread in all directions as far as he could see. He coughed and cackled merrily. “Look at these world,” he cried into the wind. “These humans have turned it into one giant city. They have filled the air with smoke. My work is almost done – they have already turned their world into a moon!”

He laughed until his stomach hurt and then turned his team out to the ocean. “I’ll sink this sleigh in the sea,” he thought. “This world is so far gone that when the sun rises over this poison sky and everyone learns that Christmas is not coming, it will all belong to me!”

\* \* \*

The snowmobile flew south. Yugo strained to see through the brown smog that enveloped the vehicle. He tapped a few buttons on his radar screen, but his scanners could still not detect the Anti-Claus.

Iggy looked below at the sea of lights that spread without end below them. “What is all the smoke?” he asked. “Has there been a big fire?”

Commander Peevey sighed. “The world of 2488 is much different than yours. Of course, many of the things that went on in your time have made this planet what it is today.

“There are 70 billion people living on Earth today. Virtually the entire planet surface is covered by a single city. There are no fields or forests or swimming holes. Just streets and buildings without end. The smoke you see is not from a fire, it is the pollution that has been filling the sky for nearly a thousand years.

“Many people have chosen to leave the Earth and live on the Moon. I prefer to live on a Class 5 Starcruiser myself.”

“People prefer to live on the Moon?” asked Sam. “But the Moon is just a barren rock spinning in space.”

“Many would say the same of Earth,” replied the Commander. “I don’t know why Santa Claus does not leave as well. Probably because Christmas is the only thing left that gives people hope. And that keeps the world from dying.”

“Gotcha!” interrupted Yugo, pointing to a flashing green dot on his radar screen. “The Anti-Claus is heading for the coast.” He turned the snowmobile west and increased his speed.

Five minutes later the sleigh came into view. Yugo engaged the laser cannons and fired a warning shot over it. The Anti-Claus did not slow down or alter his course.

“What can we do now?” asked Sam. “We can’t very well shoot down the sleigh!”

“I don’t know,” said Yugo.

“What do you suggest, Commander?” asked Iggy.

“We would probably vaporize him with a cosmic torpedo,” said Commander Peevey. “But that’s just how we do things in Star Patrol.”

“Maybe you should try one of those new buttons,” suggested Sam.

“Worth a shot,” said Yugo. He flipped open a cover and pressed a flashing green switch. The snowmobile immediately rolled over and began flying upside down. Yugo turned off the switch and the snowmobile returned to its proper orientation. “Can’t imagine why I installed one of those,” he muttered.

“How about that one?” asked Hextor, pointing to a purple dial.

“Okeedokee,” said Yugo and he spun the dial sharply. A hatch on top of the snowmobile popped open and Commander Peevey was ejected up and out of the snowmobile. The remaining occupants of the snowmobile watched in horror as the Commander arced up over the snowmobile and plummeted in front of them.

Commander Peevey reached into his utility belt and pulled out his standard issue Star Patrol grappling gun. He aimed it at the sleigh’s runners and fired. A thin silver cable snaked out of the gun and looped around the runner; arresting the Commander’s fall. He began to climb hand over hand up the cable.

“Wow,” said Yugo. “I am going to have to make one of those.”

“Look, he has almost reached the sleigh,” said Iggy. Sure enough, Commander Peevey was pulling himself up the back of the sleigh. He used his free hand to draw his Laser-Matic rapid fire automatic laser pistol from its holster, cocked it and flipped into the back of the sleigh. He rolled to his feet with trained precision. He raised the Laser-Matic and tapped the Anti-Claus on the shoulder. The demon turned and trained his yellow eyes on the Commander. He snorted and blue steam curled out of his nose.

“Look, it’s a spaceman,” the Anti-Claus giggled.

Commander Peevey pointed his Laser-Matic at the Anti-Claus. “The game’s over,” he said. “Now land this sleigh.”

The Anti-Claus looked down his long thin nose and smiled. “Come now, do you really think that bauble can hurt me?” He made a quick gesture and the Laser-Matic melted in Commander Peevey’s grasp. The Commander tossed the ruined pistol aside and groped at his utility belt for his chemical grenades. The Anti-Claus grabbed the Commander’s silk scarf and held him in the air. He shook the Commander violently and threw him to the floor of the sleigh.

“Your pitiful science can’t stop me!” he screamed.

“We’ve got to help him,” said Iggy. “The Anti-Claus is going to destroy him.”

“All right,” said Yugo. “Let’s try one more.” This time he pulled a black lever. A thick black tube protruded from the front of the snowmobile and a huge metal net shot out. The net wrapped itself around the two lead reindeer. The sleigh began to descend.

As the sleigh dropped, the Anti-Claus turned from the Commander and began cursing the reindeer. It was to no avail, with the sleigh fully loaded, the remaining reindeer could not keep it aloft and it came to a rough landing in a large parking lot.

Yugo glided down beside the sleigh. The elves and Hextor stepped out to face the Anti-Claus for the second time in 500 years.

The Anti-Claus leapt from the sleigh, spread his vast leather wings and glared at the small band. Hextor the wizard took a step towards him. He dug into a pouch at his belt and pulled out a handful of green powder. The Anti-Claus flapped his wings and the powder blew harmlessly away.

“Your spells will not avail you this time, Hextor. You can’t stop me forever. I will just keep coming back again and again and again until I claim this world as my own. Look about you. The people of this world have paved the entire planet. It is a moon already!”

Hextor mumbled a spell and started wiggling his fingers. “Oh no you don’t,” said the Anti-Claus. He flicked his wrist and waved at Hextor, transforming him into a blue duck. Hextor quacked and flapped his wings miserably.

The elves scrambled to the snowmobile as the Anti-Claus turned to them and raised his hand. Energy crackled and formed around his fingertips. As he prepared to cast his spell, the Anti-Claus was struck in the back of the head by a toy rocket. He whirled on his hooves at his attacker.

The Commander was standing in the sleigh. He reached into the big bag of toys and pulled out another rocket. He threw again, but missed. The rocket skidded to a stop where the elves were huddled by the snowmobile.

“He’s right, you know,” said Sam. “He’ll just keep coming back, no matter what we do.”

“Maybe not,” said Iggy. He reached over and picked up the toy rocket. Commander Peevey hurled another rocket and a computer game at the Anti-Claus.

“Begone!” bellowed the Anti-Claus. A beam of orange light shot out from the Anti-Claus’ fingers and struck the Commander in the chest. He was thrown from the sleigh, landing heavily on the pavement several metres away.

Iggy picked up the rocket and walked up to the Anti-Claus. “Merry Christmas, Mr. Swyne,” he said.

The Anti-Claus stood dumbfounded. A full minute passed and then another. Then he slowly reached down and accepted the gift that Iggy had offered.

Of course, no one had ever given the Anti-Claus anything before. Now for the first time his ages of existence he experienced the generosity of another and his heart filled with an unfamiliar feeling. A feeling of hope.

Once the Anti-Claus felt hope, he could be a demon no longer. His purple blistered skin healed and faded. His watery yellow eyes became clear and his hooked and pointed teeth lost their edge.

He looked up at Iggy. There was a tear in his eye. The first tear he had ever shed. His black wings shrivelled away. A demon no more, the Anti-Claus stood before them as a harmless old man. He stood up straight.

He gestured at the duck and Hextor reappeared. With another wave of his hand he healed Commander Peevey’s injuries.

“What a fool I have been,” he said softly. “I think I understand something about Christmas I did not before. There is hope for all of us. I can feel that now.”

He set the little toy rocket in the enormous bag. “We’ve got to get the sleigh back to the North Pole,” said Iggy.

There is no time,” said Leviticus Swyne. “In a few hours it will be Christmas. We will have to deliver these toys ourselves.” Leviticus stepped into the sleigh and picked up the reins. He signalled to the Commander to join him.

Hextor and the elves returned to the snowmobile. Yugo contacted the North Pole on the mobile videophone. Santa Claus appeared on the screen and Yugo apprised him of the situation. A few minutes later a list of gifts and addresses scrolled out of the snowmobile’s fax.

Yugo rolled down the window and waved to Leviticus and Commander Peevey. "Follow me," he called. The snowmobile climbed into the air. The sleigh followed. Christmas was coming in 2488 after all. But for the first time in history, Santa Claus was not going to bring it.

## 5 – Christmas Regained

Dawn came to the world as the snowmobile returned to the North Pole. A tired band climbed out onto the snow. Santa Claus and the other elves were there to greet them. He hugged each of the group in turn and thanked them. Last of all, he reached Leviticus Swyne.

"Can you ever forgive me for all I've done," asked Leviticus.

Santa Claus paused a moment, then shook Leviticus' hand. "Of course I can. I always knew that there was good in you, Leviticus. It just took Christmas to bring it out." Santa Claus put his arm around Leviticus and led him to the Santa Claus Rower. "You know, I could use somebody with your abilities around here. With so many people in the world it's almost impossible to do all my work in one night. Would you consider becoming my apprentice?"

Iggy smiled and rejoined Yugo, Sam and Hextor in the snowmobile. Yugo set the time co-ordinates and initiated the time travel sequence. There was a tremendous flash of light and the snowmobile disappeared.

It reappeared on Christmas Island 500 years before. Only five minutes had passed since Commander Peevey had come and gone. They stepped out of the snowmobile and called for Santa Claus. He stepped out of the woods and stopped short.

"My, you certainly fixed up the snowmobile in a hurry," he said.

"Well, it's a long story," Yugo said, smiling at the thought that this very snowmobile would be in a museum at the North Pole one day.

"We should get going," said Sam.

"There is just one thing left," said Santa Claus. "There are people who are still following the Anti-Claus. They must learn the meaning of Christmas again."

"Isn't that what we do?" asked Iggy.

"Everyone must discover it for themselves, we cannot do it for them," said Santa Claus. "But of course we can help," he added with a twinkle in his eye. He raised his arms in the air and a million faint sparkles of light flowed up into the sky. A large snowflake drifted down and settled on the beach. Soon the air was filled with swirling spiralling snowflakes.

It was the first snowfall Christmas Island had ever known. And around the world the sky was filled with dancing flakes of snow. The people who had been robbing and looting looked up at the sky in wonder. Slowly they began to feel the spirit of Christmas again. Christmas snow is like that. They set down their bricks and stones and gradually began walking home, hand in hand.

Santa Claus lowered his arms. "Come on boys, we have a lot of work to do and only a few days to go. I think we are going to be having Christmas this year after all."