

WHAT'S PAST IS PRESENT

A SCIENCE FICTION MYSTERY ADVENTURE TALE

MY FRIEND CRAIG CLAIMS TIME TRAVEL IS IMPOSSIBLE.

HE'S PROBABLY RIGHT.

The little white mouse darted across the table, jerked his head to look over his shoulder, and disappeared. Iggy, Yugo and Sam blinked in amazement.

“Wow, Hextor, neat trick,” said Iggy.

Hextor the wizard¹ leaned back in his chair and smiled. To a master of the arcane and mystic arts, the disappearance of a rodent was a mere parlour trick. But, since they were sitting in Santa Claus' parlour, it seemed appropriate.

“But where did he go?” asked Yugo.

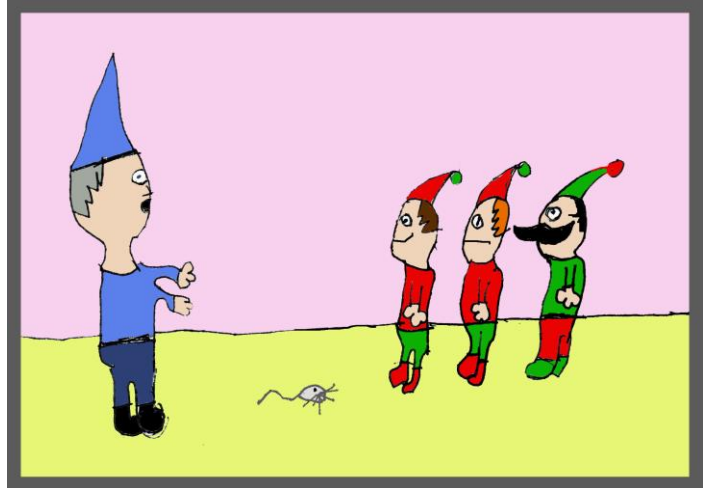
¹ This story assumes that you have read an earlier adventure called [The Return of Leviticus Swyne](#), which is a much longer story than this one is. You may want to stop reading now and go look up the other one. If you cannot be bothered with reading a great big long story right now, then you need to know a couple of things that happened in that story to help you understand this one. First, Hextor the Wizard is an actual real wizard who can do real magic tricks. The elves met him when they traveled to medieval times and he eventually returned to the present day with them to live at the North Pole. Second, in the course of that story, the elves travel to Christmas Island to save Christmas (it's a long story, you really ought to read it) and through a series of complicated and tragic events, Yugo's snowmobile sinks in the Pacific Ocean. The snowmobile is later replaced in a particularly cunning way with a new snowmobile, which is the one Yugo uses in this story. All clear? Good, then carry on.

Hextor frowned. He had never thought about where things went when he made them disappear. He was always satisfied that they *did* disappear and never inquired further. He ran through the trick in his mind to see if he could divine the mouse's location.

There was a tremendous shriek and one of the cooks ran out of the kitchen, waving her arms, her face contorted into a mask of fear. She screamed again and ran out of the parlour.

"The kitchen, I think," said Hextor.

Sure enough, a moment later the little white mouse skittered out of the kitchen. He took one look at Hextor and scooted back into the kitchen. Apparently magical translocation was somewhat discomfoting to mice.



A tall and stately gentleman entered the room. He cleared his throat and said, "Mr. Claus will see you now." Hextor and the elves got up and followed the butler down a thickly carpeted hall and into Santa Claus' study.

The study was located in the penthouse of the 24 story Santa Claus Tower which was itself located precisely upon the North Pole. The Santa Claus Tower was the nerve centre of Santa's worldwide toy distribution and good will operation. There were floors dedicated to toy design and construction, mail sorting and cataloguing and even reindeer nutrition.

Santa Claus himself lived in the penthouse. The suite was comfortably, though not extravagantly, furnished. The study was small and the walls were lined with bookcases. Santa's desk was cluttered with charts and lists and binders and scrolls and books. There was only one thing missing from the study - Santa Claus himself!

Iggy noticed that the window was open and dashed across the room to look out. In the distance he could see a strange looking vehicle flying away from the Santa Claus Tower with another similar looking machine in pursuit. The two vehicles looked something like Yugo's snowmobile, but of course, there was only one of those and Yugo was in the room.

Sam walked behind the desk and sat in Santa Claus' chair. "What is going on?" he asked. "Santa Claus calls us to come up to his office two days before Christmas and now nobody's here."

Yugo walked over to the window and scratched his chin thoughtfully. "Why would anyone leave a window open at the North Pole in December?" he wondered aloud. "And those two crafts we saw flying away. I fear that something sinister is afoot."

The elves investigated further. The butler confirmed that Santa Claus had been in his study only minutes earlier when he had left to collect the elves. Nobody had seen him leave his study. The elves quickly concluded that Santa Claus had been kidnapped. There seemed to be no other explanation. With only two days to go until Christmas, the situation was desperate, indeed.

Iggy, Yugo, Sam and Hextor walked out of the Santa Claus Tower and stood around Yugo's incredible snowmobile. Readers of these tales will know that this was no ordinary snowmobile. It was about the size of a small van and was completely enclosed. With the flip of a switch or the turn of a dial, the snowmobile could be converted to a powerboat, an airplane or even a time machine.

The elves climbed inside and Yugo fired up the 16 cylinder lithium fission engine. The snowmobile roared to life. Yugo shifted it into gear and eased the snowmobile forward. Nobody spoke for a time. Then Yugo snapped his fingers.

"I've got it!" he cried. "We're sitting in a time machine. All we have to do is go back in time about 20 minutes, stake out the Santa Claus Tower and prevent the kidnapping!"

"But Yugo," Iggy scowled, "you always say that we should not use the time machine to solve problems. You say it always creates even more trouble. What about paradoxes and all the laws of science and physics?"

"But Iggy, this is important. This is bigger than science or physics. This is Santa Claus we're talking about here!"

There was no answer to Yugo's argument and the decision was made. Yugo typed in the time destination on the keyboard and punched 'ENTER'. The familiar chime of the time reverberator rang out and a gap in the space-time continuum opened up before them. There was a tremendous flash of light. The ground disappeared beneath the snowmobile and the elves fell into the past. Another gap opened before them and the snowmobile slid into it. A second later, it was twenty minutes earlier.

Yugo drove around to the back of the Santa Claus Tower, "we'll wait here," he said. "The kidnapers should arrive at any moment."

Iggy looked out his window and up to the penthouse high above them. He felt a strange wrenching feeling in his stomach when he realized that at that very

moment they were sitting upstairs in the parlour watching Hextor make a mouse disappear. In another moment, the butler would appear and usher them into the study. He looked around at his friends. Yugo and Hextor looked just as queasy as Iggy felt. Sam was eating a bag of chips.

“Look!” shouted Yugo. High above them a flying machine swung around the far side of the Santa Claus Tower and approached the window of the study. It stopped there and hung in mid-air. The machine was perhaps 6 metres long and painted a brilliant red. The elves and Hextor watched in horror as the study window opened and Santa Claus leaned out. Two pairs of arms reached out and pulled him into the contraption. The machine’s door slid closed and it began to float away from the window.

Sam rapped Yugo on the shoulder. “Hurry up, they’re getting away!” he shouted.

“They won’t get far,” Yugo promised through gritted teeth. “Watch this. I’ve installed a few modifications.” He pulled a yellow lever and the snowmobile rose into the air as if they were riding an invisible elevator. Yugo pressed a red button and the snowmobile stopped its ascent, spun and flew after the kidnapper’s vehicle.

Yugo was surprised at how much the other craft resembled his own snowmobile. Could someone else have built a copy? It seemed impossible, but then Yugo remembered the original snowmobile had been sunk off the coast of Christmas Island. Could the kidnappers have salvaged the original snowmobile in order to carry out their plot?

Iggy squirmed impatiently in his seat. He stole a glance behind him and was shocked to see his own face looking out at him from the open penthouse window. Of course, when you travel in time, there is always a risk you might meet yourself. You can only hope that you remembered to floss that morning in order to make a good impression on yourself.

The snowmobile flew after the kidnappers who dipped and dodged erratically. It took all of Yugo’s skill to match their course. Sam was beginning to get a little sick to his stomach and set aside his bag of chips.

Yugo pulled a green lever and flicked a red switch, arming the fore laser cannons.² He dared not shoot at the other vehicle with Santa Claus aboard, but perhaps a warning shot would slow them down. He fired one shot high and to the left of the escaping craft. It swerved dramatically to the right. Yugo turned to follow it. There was a blinding flash of light and then the kidnappers simply disappeared.

² There were four cannons at the fore.

Yugo flew through the spot the kidnappers had occupied only a moment before. He circled the area for several minutes but found no sign of them. He activated his ion tracing mechanism but there was no trace of the other vehicle. There was not even a stray molecule they could follow. It had completely and utterly vanished.

Yugo dropped back down to the ground and shook his head. "I have a theory," he explained. "I think the kidnappers, whoever they are, have salvaged my old snowmobile from the Pacific Ocean and refurbished it. Then they used it to come here and kidnap Santa Claus and escaped from us using the time travel function. That's the only way to elude an ion trace. They have gone to a different time entirely.

"But if they are in a totally different time, we'll never find them," complained Iggy.

"There is only one thing to do," said Yugo grimly. "We need to go back in time again. This time, instead of staking out the kidnapping, we'll get there before the kidnappers and prevent it from happening in the first place."

Iggy was about to interject to remind Yugo of the perils of paradox but he knew that Yugo, once he set his mind to it, would not be easily dissuaded. He tapped a new time destination code on the keyboard and the time reverberator chimed again. They felt the twisting downward spiral for an infinite moment and then the burst back into their familiar reality.

They were another twenty minutes in the past and parked at the base of the Santa Claus Tower. "We don't have much time," muttered Yugo. He pulled the yellow lever and they rose to the penthouse. Yugo swung the snowmobile around the penthouse towards the study window. "We'll warn Santa Claus and then he can escape before the kidnappers arrive," he said.

They passed the parlour window. Iggy looked in and was shocked to see himself watching Hextor make the mouse disappear. They only had a couple of minutes to spare. If only Yugo had given them more time!

They reached the study window and Yugo pushed the pause button. The snowmobile stopped outside the window, hovering on a column of air.

Yugo opened his door and rapped on the study window. Santa Claus was sitting in his chair with his back towards them. He had made a list and was checking it twice. He turned when he heard the knock, rose and opened the window.

"Yugo, my goodness," said Santa. "I just sent Jason for you. I thought you were waiting in the parlour!"

"I am," answered Yugo. He saw the confused look on Santa's face. "Look, we don't have much time, you are in terrible danger --"

"Look!" shouted Sam, pointing to the ground below. The kidnappers!" Sure enough, down at the bottom of the Tower was the red vehicle so reminiscent of Yugo's snowmobile.

"There's no time!" shouted Iggy. He slid open his door and together he and Sam pulled Santa Claus into the snowmobile. "Come on!" they shouted.

Hextor stared out the window and watched with shock as the kidnapper's vehicle shot up into the air. It reached their altitude, spun and flew towards them. Yugo pulled away from the study window.

"What is going on?" Santa Claus bellowed.

"Kidnappers!" shouted Yugo. "Don't worry, you're safe now. They can't get you while you are with us."

Sam gave a whoop. "We've changed history! We've prevented the kidnapping from ever happening!"

"Now, if we can just get away," said Yugo. He pressed the accelerator to the floor. The snowmobile jerked forward, but the other craft stayed close behind. Yugo dipped and dodged erratically, but the kidnappers continued to follow them closely.

"Whoever is flying that thing can really drive," thought Yugo. He looked in his rear view mirror to see if he could identify the kidnappers, but could not see through the tinted windshield of the other craft.

Suddenly a laser bolt shot past them on the left. "Aargh!" shouted Sam. "We're under attack!"

Yugo pulled the steering wheel hard to the right and the snowmobile veered away from the laser fire. "Iggy, activate the time travel sequence! We have to get out of here!" he shouted.

Iggy looked around in panic. "What do I do?" he cried.

"Just punch in a number and press 'ENTER'."

Iggy typed in '7' and hit 'ENTER'. For the third time in an hour they felt a sickening lurch as they slipped through time.

The snowmobile reappeared some considerable time later. The kidnapers were nowhere to be seen. They had escaped!

Yugo landed the snowmobile and eased it to a stop. He checked his console. "We've travelled one week into the future." He gave a nervous laugh, "we've missed Christmas!"

Santa Claus had not said much since the elves and Hextor rescued him from his study, but the thought of missing Christmas made him pale.

Iggy said, "we are not in the clear yet. The kidnapers could still be looking for us. We need a place to hide out until we can be sure that Santa Claus is safe."

Santa Claus shook his head. He just could not believe that anyone wanted to kidnap him. But he knew the others had seen the kidnapping happen so there could be no doubt. Yugo suggested they go to Elves Barracks B to settle on a course of action. Santa Claus was rarely seen in Elves Barracks B so it was unlikely that the kidnapers would look for him there.

Elves Barracks B was a single story flat roofed building about 500 metres south of the Santa Claus Tower.³ It was connected to the high rise by a network of underground tunnels. Iggy, Yugo and Sam shared a room in the West Wing. It was just down the hall from the recreation room with the big rear projection television set where Sam spent most of his free time. The elves led Santa Claus into the rear entrance, past the rec room and stepped into their bedroom.

Iggy stepped into the room first and was surprised to see Yugo and Sam were already there, engaging in a discussion at the foot of Sam's bunk. He swung his head around to look over his shoulder and in so doing received the biggest shock so far in what had been a day of surprises. He was looking at himself.

At first he thought he was looking into a mirror then realized he was looking at another elf, who looked just like him. The other elf looked at his watch and nodded. "Hello, Iggy," he said. "I'm Iggy." He gestured to Yugo and Sam on the other side of the room. "You know Yugo and Sam, of course."

Iggy took a few steps inside. Yugo, Sam, Hextor and Santa Claus followed him. There were two Iggys, a Hextor, two Yugos, two Sams, but as always, only one Santa Claus. Everyone exchanged looks and began speaking excitedly. The two Sams looked like they might exchange blows, but the other Iggy separated them.

³ The only direction it is possible to travel from the North Pole is south. Because of this, Elves Barracks A, which is located on the other side of the Santa Claus Tower is also located 500 metres south of it. As is Elves Barracks C. Elves Barracks D is located 600 metres south of the Tower, well west of Elves Barracks B.

“Please everyone, be quiet,” he said. “There is a simple explanation for everything.” The elves stopped talking and listened as the other Iggy continued. “We are the Iggy, Yugo and Sam of your future. You are the Iggy, Yugo and Sam of our past. One week ago, we had this same meeting, but we stood in your shoes and talked to the Iggy, Yugo and Sam of our future. You have brought Santa Claus here, but you must take him back at once or there will be no Christmas!”

“But what of the kidnappers?” asked Yugo.

Iggy of the future responded, “Santa Claus is perfectly safe. You see, *you* are the kidnappers.”

“What!” Iggy, Yugo and Sam yelled together.

Yugo of the future explained. “It is like I always say; you can’t use a time machine to solve problems, because time travel always creates even more problems. It leads to paradoxes. It disrupts the laws of science and physics.”

Iggy of the future coughed loudly. Yugo of the future glared at him and continued, “by using the time machine the four of you were not just in two places at once, you were actually in three places at once. While you sat in Santa’s parlour watching Hextor’s trick you were also staking out the kidnappers at the base of the Tower and you were up on the 24th floor rescuing Santa Claus from what you thought were kidnappers. But the kidnappers you thought you saw were always you, just from a different time. The flying machine that you saw from the ground was your own snowmobile in the act of rescuing, not kidnapping, Santa Claus.”

Yugo of the past hung his head.

“But now you must leave,” said Sam. “So long as you are here there cannot be a Christmas this year. Santa Claus needs to be back at the North Pole where he belongs on Christmas Eve.”

Hextor had heard enough. He had also flipped back and forth in time enough. “No Christmas?” he exclaimed. “This nonsense must stop!” He raised his arms over his head and stood on one foot. He chanted,

*“Oh Groggin one eyed god of Munsk,
Listen to my rhyme,
I beseech you to send one and all
Back to their proper time,”*

There was no chime, no flash, no vertigo. Iggy, Yugo and Sam just found themselves in Santa Claus’ study. Santa Claus sat in his chair. He brushed aside some papers and picked up a looseleaf day timer. He smiled, “It’s December 23rd.”

We are going to have Christmas after all! Now let's get to work, we have so much to get finished before Christmas."

Iggy, Yugo and Sam left the study together and stepped into the high speed elevator and dropped to the ground. "Hey, where's Hextor?" asked Sam.

It was the first time that they had noticed that the medieval wizard was no longer with them. "Do you suppose he stayed behind?" asked Iggy.

"I guess we will have to wait a week to find out," said Yugo. They stepped outside and walked to the employee's parking lot where Yugo had left the snowmobile.

But the snowmobile was gone.

"Now what?" asked Iggy.

Yugo smiled. "It's okay," he said. "It will turn up. Come on, we have work to do."

The next few days were hectic as the last days before Christmas always were. Santa Claus' delivery was completed without incident and he and Mrs. Claus hosted a huge banquet for all of the elves on Christmas Day.

Hextor was still missing, as was the snowmobile, but there had not been much time to worry about either disappearance. Life settled back down to a routine after Christmas. Neither Iggy nor Sam could understand why Yugo seemed so nonplussed about his missing snowmobile. He usually broke out in hives if he discovered a scratch or a spot of rust.

A few more days passed. Without the snowmobile, Iggy, Yugo and Sam stayed out of trouble and Santa Claus stayed out of the hands of the kidnapers.

Sam was sitting on a sofa in the rec room watching *The Flintstones* when a strange feeling overcame him. A minute before he was reliving his memories of the Christmas that just passed when he felt those memories fade away and change. Now he remembered something different. Santa Claus had disappeared under mysterious circumstances and Christmas had never happened. He looked around and all of the other elves in the room wore long faces and expressions of concern. One elf was sitting in the corner, crying. He walked over to the elf, a pudgy fellow named Porko and asked why he was crying.

"Why do you think?" Porko sobbed. "Santa Claus is gone. Christmas is gone. The whole world is crying."

Sam shook his head and strained to remember. All he could recall was that Santa was gone and that Christmas had never happened. He returned to the sofa and picked up the remote control. He flipped through 50 or 60 channels until he found a news program. The anchorman intoned in a grave voice that Santa Claus had still not been found and the "Santa Watch" had reached Day 7.

So, it was true. Santa Claus was gone. Still, something nagged at Sam. A voice in his head told him that his memory could not be trusted. Something else was wrong. He stood up and walked down the hall to the room he shared with Iggy and Yugo. Sam sat down at the end of his bed and Yugo joined him there. He explained his vague feeling that Christmas really had happened. Iggy and Yugo were also troubled. They too felt that something was not right. A vague feeling of déjà vu crept over all of the elves.

They heard footsteps approaching the room. Iggy got up to see who it was. All three elves were startled when Iggy himself walked into the room. Behind him stood Yugo, Sam, Hextor and Santa Claus; who had not been seen for a week.

The other Iggy turned to look behind him and stared directly into Iggy's face. Iggy looked at his watch and nodded. The elves all realised at once that these were elves from their own past who had travelled through time to the present. The arrival of the elves from the past had caused a bubble or a burp in the space-time continuum, changing history as they perceived it. Until Santa Claus was restored to the correct time, the burp would remain and Christmas would not happen. Their new perception would become reality.

Iggy, now Iggy of the future, shook hands with his past self and introduced everybody to themselves. Sam walked over to his past self and glared at him. He started to shout at Sam of the past and demanded he gather up Santa Claus and return to the past so that Christmas could happen. Iggy stepped in between them and explained to everyone that their former selves needed to return to the past. Then Hextor, obviously agitated, cast a spell and the other Iggy, Yugo and Sam disappeared, together with Santa Claus and Hextor himself.

The instant they disappeared, Sam's memories of a perfect Christmas returned. He recalled how Santa had performed his annual task and the big banquet that followed. The idea that Christmas never happened faded to a dark and uneasy corner of his mind.

Yugo clapped his hands and ran out into the employee's parking lot. His snowmobile was parked in the usual spot, as he knew it would be. Their past selves had brought it forward in time, but Hextor had sent them back in time without it. Yugo had caught up with the future and his snowmobile.

He opened the door and slid behind the wheel. He reached for the keyboard and called up the time travel program. A series of algorithms and equations filled

the screen. With a wry grin he punched the 'DELETE' button with his thumb. The screen went blank. Then he reclined in his ergonomically correct bucket seat, slipped a CD into the premium octophonic sound system and spent the rest of the afternoon listening to Christmas carols.

* * *

But what of Hextor? As Iggy, Yugo and Sam soon realised, Hextor's spell had not only restored them to their proper time, it had also sent Hextor back to his little shack, somewhere in the middle ages.

Hextor spent Christmas that year performing tricks for village children. That evening, he attended a banquet hosted by Good King Flynn and his beautiful new bride, Queen Elizabeth-Lee.⁴

When the meal was done, Hextor noticed a mouse scurry across the dining room floor. He made a gesture and the little rodent disappeared. Good Queen Elizabeth-Lee laughed and clapped her dainty hands. "That's a wonderful trick, Hextor, but where did the mouse go?"

Suddenly there was a crash of pots in the kitchen and a serving wench rushed out screaming. Hextor smiled and replied, "Oh, I don't know, your majesty, somewhere in time and space."

⁴ Hextor turns up in a few of these old stories. These characters are from another story called a [*Fairy Merry Christmas Tale*](#).