

ELVES IN TOYLAND

A WOOLLY YARN

The universe is a big place. It is fantastically, tremendously, fabulously, outrageously, unbelievably, incredibly, unconscionably, impossibly enormous. The tiniest corner shelf of the universe is big enough to hold everything that ever was, is or will be. Everything you, or anyone else, has ever thought of exists somewhere in the universe.

For example, there is a planet called Griblox populated by a race of headless people. This is not to say they have no heads at all, they simply keep them in boxes and only take them out for holidays and special occasions. It makes driving difficult, but saves a great deal of money on shampoo. In the Fristeen dimension, the only colour that exists is green, which is a real downer, except on St Patrick's Day. The Yaaarz System is home to the most intelligent beings anywhere in the universe. These life forms are actually small pieces of string, which live in a sewing basket. They have divined the meaning of life, time and space, but unfortunately as they lack both hands and vocal cords, they have been unable to write it down or tell anyone else about it.

This story has nothing to do with any of those places. It is about an even weirder place.

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It was a year later and Christmas had returned to the North Pole. Iggy, Yugo and Sam were working overtime making sure that all of the toys were finished before Santa packed his sled. It had been a busy year, especially for Yugo. He had spent almost every available minute working on his new snowmobile. He had installed a new dashboard computer with a P-6 chip, rebuilt the engine with a 44 cylinder fuel injected lithium fission reactor, and fitted in other specialized modifications too numerous to mention. Finally, two days before Christmas, his work was complete. Iggy and Sam joined him as he rolled the new snowmobile out of its garage.

The snowmobile was like no snowmobile that had ever existed before it.¹ It was a gleaming brilliant red with a tangle of chrome pipes, conduits and wires running from one end to the other. Its oversize passenger area was completely enclosed within a tinted polyurethane bubble. At the rear were two large exhaust ports that seemed to steam even when the snowmobile was standing still. There was electric blue pin striping running up either side where it met at the front, which was adorned with a gaudy chrome hood ornament. Inside, a thousand coloured knobs, switches and dials were scattered across the dashboard, which sparkled with all manner of glowing and flashing coloured lights. There was a single bench seat, wide enough to accommodate three elves and upholstered in thick leather. On either side of the seat were large round speakers wired into a 42-channel octophonic sound system. The entire snowmobile hummed from the deep pulse of its reactor core.

Yugo beamed with pride. "Well fellas, what do you think?"

"I think it's terrific," said Iggy.

Sam sighed. "I have a bad feeling about this," he said.

"How about we take it for a test drive," said Yugo. "I've completely reconfigured the transponders and matter/energy converters. I can't wait to get it out on the open road to see what kind of acceleration it's got."

"I think I should probably leave about now," muttered Sam. But he knew it was no use.

A couple of minutes later, he was seat belted beside Iggy as Yugo pressurized the cabin, initiated the launch sequence and slipped the snowmobile into gear. The elves were thrust deeply into the cushioned seat backs as the snowmobile shot forward and sped across the snow swept ice pack of the North Pole.

"Now I have a *really* bad feeling about this," grunted Sam, though he could barely part his teeth from the force of the snowmobile's acceleration.

"Now let's see how it handles," said Yugo. He tightly gripped the joystick that controlled the snowmobile. The joystick itself was a wonder. It fit Yugo's palm exactly;

¹ Actually, there were two other snowmobiles a lot like it. The first one sank in the Pacific Ocean, and the second one exploded over the North Atlantic. I've tried to destroy this thing again and again. It's just really, really hard to get rid of a snowmobile for good.

² This is not as much of a hardship as it sounds. At the North Pole in December, there are only two colours; the sky (which is black and the snow (which is white). People who visit the North Pole in December are happy if they see the colour *grey*.

it even had a thin ridge that fit into his lifeline. There were 47 buttons of one kind or another on the joystick. Not even Yugo knew what all of them did. He twisted the joystick hard to his right. The snowmobile instantly responded, turning so sharply that the elves could only see in black and white for the next quarter of an hour.²

Yugo carried on this way for some time, weaving around snowdrifts, polar bears and the odd walrus. "Well, what do you say," he asked, "doesn't it run like a dream?"

"Yeah," replied Sam, who was starting to turn a little green, "a bad dream."

"Hardy har," replied Yugo sarcastically. He looked at a glowing blue digital display on the dashboard. "Holy smoke, look at the time.³ We had better head back." Yugo downshifted and made a long a graceful U-turn. Then he punched the turbo boosters and jammed the snowmobile into top gear. "We'll be home in no time," he boasted.

The theory of relativity tells us that strange things happen when objects travel at very high rates of speed. For example, as you approach the speed of light, time starts to pass extremely slowly, and everyone in the universe has to wait for you to slow down so you can catch up. While Iggy, Yugo and Sam were not traveling at anything close to the speed of light, they were traveling *relatively* fast. Because of this, they were about to experience something *relatively* strange. This is a result of the theory of relativity.⁴

The elves scooted down a low hill and the lights of the Santa Claus Tower came into view. The other buildings were obscured however by a glowing purple light that appeared in front of them as a small dot and started to grow.

"What is it?" shouted Sam.

Yugo stomped on his brakes and swerved hard to his left, but the light stayed right in front of them. It continued to grow until it was the size of the snowmobile. No matter what maneuvers Yugo attempted, the light remained directly in front of them. It stopped growing, and slowly approached the snowmobile. Yugo threw the snowmobile

³ All time zones converge at the North Pole. Because of this, it is always any time you want it to be. All you have to do is walk a couple of hundred yards across a few lines of longitude and it is morning again. In a pinch, you can walk across the International Date Line and it will be yesterday again. This is very handy if you are late for an appointment.

⁴ Which is related to the theory of relativity. Relatively speaking.

into reverse, but it was too late. The light was upon them and Yugo, helplessly, drove straight into it.

and came out ...

... somewhere else.

The purple light swept over them and the elves found themselves traveling along a very well maintained highway built entirely of yellow cobblestones and bordered by a neatly manicured grass boulevard. Sam rolled down his window and looked out. "I have a funny feeling we're not in the North Pole anymore," he said. Indeed, they appeared to be just about as far from the North Pole as they could be. The sun was high in the sky, and there was not a snowflake to be seen. In fact, it seemed a very pleasant summer afternoon.

In his shock at entering this strange place, Yugo had forgotten that he had just slipped the snowmobile into reverse. As a result, the snowmobile ground to a stop and began traveling backwards down the highway. Yugo pulled on the hand brake, and only narrowly missed colliding with a silver BMW coming from the other direction. The driver of the BMW veered to his left, bounced over the curb and skidded to a stop in a ditch several metres off the edge of the road. The right side door swung open and the driver burst out, yelling at Yugo.

He was a tall, dark haired gentleman wearing a white dinner jacket and a black bow tie. He came right up to the snowmobile window, hollering all the way. Yugo pressed a little black switch and his window slid down.

"What do you think you're doing," yelled the other driver. "You could have got us all killed. Just where did you get your driver's license anyway, from the top of a cereal box?"

Yugo was just opening his mouth to apologize when the stranger stopped his tirade. He seemed to be looking at the snowmobile for the first time.

"Say, that's a very impressive set of wheels," he said admiringly. "Almost as nice as my car." He gestured towards the BMW. "Of course, my car has a lot of special features."

"Oh yes?" answered Yugo. "Well, I've made a few modifications myself."

"Like what?" asked the stranger. "Power windows? Child safety seat? Eight track tape player?" He laughed softly. "I bet it doesn't have an ejection seat or machine guns behind the headlights."

"Well, of course it has all that," replied Yugo. He went on, "and radar, smoke cannons, flame thrower..."

The stranger seemed unfazed and idly kicked at one of the snowmobile's tires. "How about a grenade launcher?"

"Yes," said Yugo. "It has one of those."

"Rotating license plates?"

"Naturally."

"Tire shredder?"

"Of course."

The stranger glared at Yugo. "Anything else?" he asked.

"Well," said Yugo slowly, "Let me see. Sonar. Satellite telephone. Waffle maker. Converts to a motorboat, airplane or submarine..."

"And you can play *DOOM* on the onboard computer," added Iggy.

The stranger stared hard at the elves for a minute, trying to gauge if they were pulling his leg. There was no question it was an incredible piece of machinery, but he had some doubt about the underwater capability. Then another voice interrupted his train of thought.

"James, come on, we're going to be late," an impossibly gorgeous woman called from the BMW. The stranger looked over, smiled and waved, then turned back to the elves. "I've got to go," he said. He took one last admiring look at the snowmobile and strolled back to his car. He fired up the engine, scooted out of the ditch and sped down the highway.

"He looked awfully familiar," said Iggy. "I'm sure I've seen him somewhere before. And this street looks kind of familiar too." He looked ahead at the yellow stone road that wound all the way to the horizon. "Funny that I can't seem to remember." He rubbed his forehead as he concentrated. "Maybe I just need a new brain."

"I've been saying that for years," snorted Sam.

"Aw Sam," said Yugo, "have a heart."

Sam glared at him. Yugo shivered. "What I really need is a drink. A little courage as old Granny Lada used to say." With that he slipped the snowmobile back into gear and cautiously onto the highway. They passed an old woman with a broomstick standing on the curb. They were not paying any attention to her, so they did not notice the farmhouse fall on her a few moments later. They just carried on their way, following the yellow brick road.⁵ A young girl in a blue gingham dress stepped out of the ruined farmhouse. She looked back at the house and noticed the old woman's feet were sticking out from the basement window. Checking to see that no one was looking, the girl walked over and carefully removed the old woman's red sequin walking shoes.

Yugo drove several miles, past cottages made of straw or sticks or bricks. They even saw one made entirely of candy. Sam wanted to stop there, but both Iggy and Yugo had such a bad feeling about the place that they just kept going. A short time later, they came to a fork in the road. The yellow bricks carried on to the left. A signpost read "Emerald City, 6 km". The right fork led into a rocky trail, with no pavement at all. The sign at the side of this road read "Haunted Forest, 800m". The elves could hear horrible crunching and screaming noises coming from the direction of the Haunted Forest. It sounded a lot like a large fire breathing dragon gulping down a fresh meal of wandering knight. It took only a few seconds of discussion before Yugo turned up the left road. Within ten minutes they were driving through the suburbs of the Emerald City.

"Nice little town," remarked Yugo.

"I can see why it is called Emerald City," said Iggy. "All of the houses are green."

"So are all of the other buildings. And the telephone poles. And the streetlights," added Sam. It was true. Every object in sight, save the yellow brick road beneath them was a gleaming emerald green. "It almost makes me regret getting my colour vision back," Sam grumbled.

"There's a gas station," said Yugo. "I'll pull over here and see if we can get some directions." He pulled the snowmobile into a modern green service station, with green gas pumps, a green convenience store and a little man dressed entirely in green pumping gas. Yugo parked the snowmobile beside a large green pylon sign that spelled

⁵ This last sequence has been freely adapted (i.e., plagiarized) from a similar sequence in the Terry Pratchett novel *Witches Abroad*. Mr. Pratchett is a very funny man and you should read his books. I'd rather you never told him I stole his idea.

out *Art's Gas 'n' Go* in big friendly letters. The three elves stepped out of the snowmobile and walked into the convenience store.

It was just like any other corner store the elves had ever been in, except it was decorated entirely in green. And all of the merchandise was green. And there was an enormous man standing behind the counter dressed from head to toe in a gleaming silver suit of armour. A green plastic nametag pinned to his massive chest plate said *LANCE How may I Help You?*

Iggy walked up to the counter, eyeing the cashier carefully. "Um, hello," he said, looking down at the green plastic nametag. "Lance. My friends and I are a little bit lost. I don't suppose you can tell us the way to the North Pole?"

Lance looked down at Iggy. "North, I expect," he said.

Iggy smiled uncomfortably. "Could you give us some idea of how far north?"

Lance leaned over the counter and rested his boxcar of a jaw on an enormous steel gauntlet. "Can't say as I hath heard tell of this North Pole," he said. "There's the North Woods, the North Plains and the Northern Frontier. Would ye be wanting to go to one of them? Now there be a pole of sorts at the center of towne; would you be wanting to go to the May Pole? Always lots of people at the May Pole there be."

Yugo stepped forward. "That sounds promising. How do we get there?" he asked.

Lance stood up and reached back. His gigantic hand wrapped around the pommel of a great broadsword that was stabbed into a heavy green anvil behind the counter. He gave a firm jerk and the sword pulled free with a faint chime. He waved it over the elves' heads.

Iggy, Yugo and Sam dove for cover behind a green cardboard display rack filled with green bags of potato chips. Lance pointed with the sword at the other side of the parking lot. It hummed like a choir of angels when Lance swung it across the room.

"Ye take the east fork and verily proceed for two leagues. When ye reach an inne on yonder corner, ye turn left and follow the winding path until ye reach Main Street." Lance swung his sword to point at Main Street, far over the horizon. "At Main Street, ye turn south for another league, and forsooth, ye be at the May Pole."

Iggy, Yugo and Sam crawled out from behind the potato chip display. "Thank you," said Iggy. "Uh, thank ye. Thank ye very kindly."

"Not at all," said Lance. He lowered the sword. A long low note rang from it.

"That is some sword," said Iggy.

"That it be," answered Lance, sliding it back into the anvil. A tone reminiscent of the lost chord tolled. "It be my master's. But he be away till eventimes and he bestoweth it upon me in his absence."

Iggy nodded, and he and Yugo backed slowly out of the shop.

"Wait up, fellas." said Sam. "I am going to get some chips."

Iggy and Yugo backed out of the store and climbed into the snowmobile. Sam joined them a moment later and Yugo pulled out of the parking lot and onto the east fork. Sam opened his bag of potato chips and looked inside.

"Eeew," he said. "They're green."⁶

Yugo followed the road for what he guessed what was about one league (though he really had no idea how far a league was). Traffic got much heavier and finally slowed to a stop.

"Iggy, why don't you hop out and see what the holdup is," asked Yugo.

"I'm on my way," said Iggy, opening the passenger hatch and stepping outside. He walked a few hundred metres past a long line of traffic and finally reached the source of the problem. Car and engine parts were strewn across the road, with remnants of some type of colourful woven fabric scattered among them. There had been an accident involving two cars and what might have been a magic carpet. The two drivers were involved in a heated argument with the carpet's pilot at the side of the road.

The first fellow, a short stocky man with no shoes and the hairiest feet Iggy had ever seen pointed his thick, stubby finger at the pilot's chest. "You know you can't fly one of those things so low over the city," he said.

"I was not flying too low," said the pilot, "You were not watching the road." The pilot was a young man with a swarthy complexion. He was dressed in a blue vest and white baggy pants with a yellow patch on one knee. He wore a red fez on his head and a small monkey sat on his shoulder making faces at the other two.

The third figure spoke up. "Aaar, he be right, ye know, ye weren't watchin' the road. Ye be watchin' him and ye drove right into me." The third man was very tall and

⁶ Sam ate all of the potato chips anyway. He did not offer any to Iggy and Yugo.

wore a heavy red overcoat that hung to his knees. He had a faded black three-corner hat on his head and a patch over one eye. Unlike the young man, he did not have a monkey on his shoulder. There was no room there because of the parrot.

The short man turned to him. "How do you know what I was looking at, you only have one eye. And anyway, how can you even drive at all with that?" he asked, pointing at the tall man's leg. Iggy noticed for the first time that it ended in a wooden peg.

"There be nothing wrong with me leg. It be me hand that give me trouble driving." He raised his hand, which was actually no hand at all but a metal hook that ended in a fearsome point. "But now my hand be giving ye some trouble."

He waved the hook in the short man's face. The little fellow took a couple of steps back and stammered, "Um, surely we can work this out like gentlemen," he mumbled.

It was clear that they could not. The tall man, the youth and the monkey stepped forward menacingly. Iggy was about to step in and try to break up the fight, when the little man reached into his pocket, pulled out a gold ring and slipped it on his finger. As soon as it passed over his last knuckle, the little man disappeared.

Iggy rubbed his eyes. So did the young man from the carpet.⁷ The little man was nowhere to be seen. He had completely vanished, though Iggy thought he could hear him whistling on the side of the road. With the short man gone, the other two seemed to lose interest in the fight, and traffic began to move again. Iggy jogged back to the snowmobile.

"I don't know what kind of place this is, but it certainly is strange," he said. "I think I just saw a pirate try to kill a hobbit."

"I think you've been reading too many books," said Sam. "Myself, I avoid reading books. I figure anything worth reading will be made into a movie eventually."

Iggy and Yugo just sighed. Yugo eased the snowmobile slowly forward. "Well, we're moving again. Hopefully once we get into town, we can figure out where we are and how to get back." They headed down the road for what Yugo thought was probably another league or so. They reached an intersection, with a very rundown hotel on one corner.

"I'll bet that is the inn that Lance was talking about," said Iggy.

⁷ The tall man did not rub his remaining eye. He had done so once before, just after he got his hook (which explains the eye patch). This is not the sort of mistake a person makes twice.

"I think he called it an inne," said Sam.

"Inn, inne. Whatever," said Iggy. "We turn left here."

The inne was an old rotting two-story wooden structure. A dilapidated sign hung over the door. It said *Three Bears Pub*. Yugo turned left and was about to take the winding path downtown when a young, red haired girl charged out of the hotel. She waved her arms and ran towards the snowmobile.

"Help! Help!" she called, "they're after me!"

Yugo hit the brakes and opened his door. The girl jumped inside and landed on Sam's lap. Green potato chip crumbs sprayed everywhere.

"Shut the door!" yelled the girl, "they're coming!"

Yugo pulled the door shut. "Who's coming?" he asked. Then he saw them. Two enormous black bears strode out of the hotel lobby, looking up and down the road. A smaller bear followed them. The cub pointed towards the snowmobile with one shaggy paw and growled at the others. The two larger bears looked over at the snowmobile and ran surprisingly quickly toward it.

"Go! Go!" shouted the girl.

The bears reached the snowmobile and started to push on it. It rocked back and forth. The smallest bear climbed onto the hood and stared in at the elves. Yugo stomped on the accelerator. Inside the miniature a tightly focused molecular stream bombarded reactor the lithium core. A small delicately controlled cold fusion nuclear reaction, understood by three physicists on Earth⁸ took place and the snowmobile lurched forward.

The girl rolled over onto Iggy's lap as Yugo pulled out into the street. The bears were scattered on each side of the snowmobile as Yugo sped away from them.

The girl sat up and brushed potato chip crumbs from her sleeve. "Thanks for the rescue," she said. "If it wasn't for you, they would have eaten me. By the way, my name is Goldilocks. You can call me Goldie."

The elves looked at each other. "Goldilocks?" said Iggy. "But you're a redhead!"

⁸ And Yugo.

"Yeah," said Goldie. "I know it is a bit odd. But everyone in my family is named after their hair colour and my parents thought Reddylocks sounded silly."

"Three bears?" said Yugo.

"Yeah, they're terrible hosts. I stayed at their lousy hotel last night. This morning they served me this porridge, but they couldn't get it right. Too hot. Too cold. Then the chair I was sitting in broke and they went crazy, growling and grunting like a bunch of animals."

"But you're not real!" said Sam. "You're just a made up person. You're a fairy tale!"

Goldie glared at Sam. "I must say this is the first time I've been called a made up person by a midget with pointy ears dressed in red and green velvet. I hate to burst your bubble buster, but if anyone in this contraption is made up, it's you. Anyway, I'm glad you came along when you did. You're real enough for me."

Sam thought about this for a moment. "You know, you're not the only person in this place who isn't real. Nothing we've seen since we got here has been real!"

"You're right, Sam," said Iggy. "Everything about this place is made up. We drove on a yellow brick road to the Emerald City. We just about ran James Bond off the road."

"And then we got directions from Sir Lancelot at the gas station," said Yugo.

"And that really was a magic carpet and a hobbit and Long John Silver," said Iggy. "Now everything makes sense. It's a world of make believe people!"

"And just how does that make sense?" asked Sam slowly.

"Uh, well, I'm not sure," said Iggy. "Actually, I guess it does not make much sense at all. But at least we know where we are."

"Oh, and just where might that be," asked Sam even more slowly.

Iggy scratched his head for a moment before Yugo interrupted. "We are obviously in some kind of alternate dimension. I expect that the new lithium fusion process, coupled with our velocity at the time created an instability, which produced a wormhole between dimensions and brought us into this other reality. These sorts of things can happen when you work with transquantum nuclear physics. I'm going to have to install better shielding on the reactor when we get back."

"When we get back?" said Sam. "When we get back? And just how do you suppose we are going to get back? Take the train? What time do you think the express to the next dimension leaves the station?"

Yugo shook his head and smiled. "All we have to do is reverse the process. I'll just reconfigure the particle accelerator, reverse the polarity on the warp batteries, reintegrate the phason coils, override the vortex inhibitor, turn on the ignition and we should pop right back home."

"That sounds simple," said Sam.

"Actually, it's not much trouble," said Yugo. "All of these systems are controlled by a central computer. I can do the necessary programming in a few minutes."

"Well, what are we waiting for?" asked Sam. "Let's get started. I've already missed lunch."

Yugo turned off the main road and pulled over beside a few small shops. He turned on the computer and began typing in new lines of code at a furious pace. Iggy stepped out of the snowmobile. "I'm going to pick up a few postcards here," he said. "You know how it is with trips. You never know if you'll be back this way again."

"I'll join you," said Sam. "I could use a snack."

"Me too," said Goldie. "All I've eaten today was porridge, and the bears chased me out before they could get it 'just right'".

Iggy, Sam and Goldie climbed out of the snowmobile and strolled down the street. There were clothing stores: *Rumplestiltskin Fine Suits---Our Fall Line Wears Like Spun Gold*; Furniture shops: *Antiques---F. Flintstone, prop.*; and restaurants: *Captain Ahab's House of Halibut---Come harpoon a whale of a meal!*. Iggy found a small souvenir shop on the corner and stepped inside.

There was the usual detritus one finds in every souvenir shop in the universe: collectible spoons, salt and pepper shakers, bumper stickers that said *I Heart the Emerald City*, ashtrays, tea towel calendars, shot glasses, shirts with the logo *My Grandparents Went to the Emerald City and All They Brought Me was this Lousy T-Shirt*, and postcards.

Iggy selected a few cards with panoramic scenes of the city, views of ornate green churches, a photo of the Haunted Forest and one shot of the May Pole, a thin, green pole that towered above everything else in town. He took his selections to the counter where a silver haired man wearing a green shirt with a blue sweater vest greeted him. A gold plastic nametag identified him as *Customer Service Doug*.

"Well by gosh and by golly; elves," said Customer Service Doug to Iggy. "What can I help you with today, young fellow?"

"Thought I'd pick up a few cards while I was in town," said Iggy. "I left my camera at home, and my friends will never believe this place."

Customer Service Doug took the cards, placed them in a small brown bag, and rang up the sale. "You should never leave home without your camera. I never do." He held up a small black camera, which dangled from his wrist by a thin black strap.

Sam spotted a restroom in the back of the shop. "I'll be with you in a moment," he said to Iggy, and made his way to the rear.

"I know where you're going," called Customer Service Doug.

Sam returned from the restroom, a little embarrassed, and bought a soda, a hot dog and three large chocolate cupcakes.⁹ As Customer Service Doug slipped the hot dog into a bun, he chanted "it's all red--ready and it's all red hot, there's a wiener in the middle and a bun on the top."

"Just give me the dog, Doug," sneered Sam. "I can do without the serenade." Sam collected his snacks and the three of them stepped out of the little shop and back out into the street.

Customer Service Doug smiled as they walked out the door. "Well, I wouldn't be the least bit circumcised," he said. "Elves in my store. The guys at the Lodge will never believe this. They'll say that my heart is pumping pee."

Iggy, Sam and Goldie joined Yugo in the snowmobile. "You'll never believe this guy we met in the souvenir shop," said Sam, and described Customer Service Doug to Yugo.

Yugo laughed. "He sounds like a real character."

"That's just it," said Sam. "He was the most unreal character I've seen in this place. If anybody here is a work of fiction, he's it."

Yugo changed the subject completely. "Good news," he said. "I've finished reformatting the hard drive. All I have to do is push this button. That will reverse what we did before, opening a new pathway which will whisk us straight home."

⁹ He did not share any of these goodies with Iggy or Yugo, either.

"I think I'll step outside, then," said Goldie. Iggy, Yugo and Sam fastened their seat belts and Yugo counted down dramatically from ten, his finger poised above a glowing pink button.

"...3 ...2 ...1 ...Blast Off!" Yugo shouted. He pressed his finger down hard on the button. There was a shimmering sensation and Iggy's ears started to pop. Then, with a thick sounding *thud* everything stopped.

"We're here!" shouted Yugo triumphantly. He opened the hatch with a flourish and the three elves stepped outside.

"My, your home looks just like the Emerald City," said Goldie.

"How did you get here?" asked Yugo. But he already knew the answer. They had never left. He turned to his two friends. "It didn't work," he said. "Now it looks like we'll be trapped in this storybookland forever."

Iggy placed a reassuring arm on Yugo's shoulder. "Hey come on," he said. "you'll think of something, you always do."

"But we've tried everything," Yugo said. "I reconfigured the particle accelerator. I reversed the polarity on the warp batteries. I reintegrated the phason coils. I overrode the vortex inhibitor. We should have skipped dimensions and gone straight home."

"Maybe there's something you haven't thought of yet," offered Iggy helpfully.

"I've thought of everything," snapped Yugo. "There's nothing left to try."

Iggy looked around in despair. His eyes fixed on a street sign on the corner near the souvenir shop. "Maybe we can find some help down this road," he said.

They all climbed back into the snowmobile and at Iggy's direction Yugo turned the corner and steered the snowmobile down Baker Street. They drove in silence for some time as Iggy stared out the window at the passing houses.

"What are you looking for," asked Sam.

"589," said Iggy, counting house numbers. "This whole world is filled with fictional characters--431--I reckon if we go to a fictional address--395--we may be able to find some help--221--Yugo, stop here!"

Yugo pulled over to the curb and parked in front of a large duplex. Iggy led Yugo, Sam and Goldie to the second of the two front doors. There was a large brass 'B' on the door.

"Where are we?" asked Goldie.

"221B Baker Street," said Iggy. "Home of the greatest detective in the world, Mr. Sherlock Holmes."

"You want to get help from a made up detective?" asked Sam.

"Why not," answered Iggy. "Sherlock Holmes has a is as real in this world as anybody in our own world. And he has one of the finest minds anywhere." The group stepped inside and found themselves in a comfortable foyer. An oak staircase with 17 steps led to the rooms upstairs. At the base of the stairs was an elderly housekeeper.

"What's all this then," she asked, glaring at the elves.

"Is Mr. Holmes in?" asked Iggy.

"E's in, but he already has visitors," said the housekeeper.

At that moment a thin reedy voice called from upstairs. "Show our guests up at once Mrs. Hudson. I dare say they may be the only people who can help us unravel this conundrum."

The four friends marched up the stairs and were shown into Sherlock Holmes' drawing room. A very tall and slender man in a silk dressing gown greeted them. He removed the pipe from between his teeth and held out his hand to Iggy. "Sherlock Holmes, at your service," he said. He gestured to a shorter, and stouter, man on the chesterfield. "This is my associate, Dr. Watson."

The elves and Goldie introduced themselves. Sherlock Holmes looked hard at Sam and said, "I see you are a left handed maker of toys named Sam with an appetite for greasy food."

Sam's jaw dropped. "How did you--"

"Oh, he does that all the time," said Dr. Watson. "It really gets on my nerves."

Sherlock Holmes explained. "I observe from looking at your hands they are covered with splotches of brightly coloured paint, such as a toy maker might use. Your beard is trimmed more neatly on the left side of your face, suggesting you are left

handed. Your name is embroidered on your tunic where I also detect an array of green potato chip crumbs, the sign of a man with a taste for junk food."

"Amazing," said Sam.

"Its elementary, my dear Sam," said Sherlock Holmes.

"He says that all of the time too," said Dr. Watson. "You will learn to hate it."

"I told you he was really smart," said Iggy.

Sherlock Holmes gestured for them to join Dr. Watson on the sofa. "I had hoped you might come," he said. "You may be able to assist us in solving a little problem about which I have just been consulted."

Another gentleman came in from the next room. He was a tall, slim man in a blue shirt. His black hair was cut short revealing high, arched eyebrows and pointed ears. He looked at Iggy, Yugo and Sam's own pointed ears, raised one eyebrow and said "fascinating" in a low voice.

"Mr. Spock here has asked me to assist him in investigating a strange atmospheric phenomenon," said Sherlock Holmes.

"What phenomenon?" asked Iggy.

Mr. Spock strode across the room and drew the curtains aside. "This atmospheric phenomenon," he said. The elves looked out the window. High in the late afternoon sky they could see an eerie purple spot. It was about the size of a medium football stadium.

"That looks like the spot we came through," said Yugo. "But it is much larger now."

"Indeed, I expected as much," said Sherlock Holmes. "And now I hope you can help explain what this spot is, and why it is growing bigger."

Yugo explained how they had run into the spot in the North Pole, driven into it, and found themselves in a different world, populated entirely by characters from books, movies and television.

"Of course, it is only logical," said Mr. Spock. "Your reactor core is obviously unstable. That instability, coupled with your *relative* velocity opened a gateway to this dimension."

"Yes, I had deduced as much myself," said Sherlock Holmes.

"Oh, of course you did," piped up Dr. Watson.

Mr. Spock turned to Yugo. "Have you tried to reverse the process by creating an inverse fission reaction while contemporaneously suppressing your protonic field?"

"Yes," said Yugo. "That was exactly what I did."

"You reconfigured your particle accelerator?"

"Of course," said Yugo.

"Did you reverse the polarity on your warp batteries?" asked Mr. Spock.

"Naturally," said Yugo.

"You reintegrated the phason coils?"

"What do you take me for, a moron?" replied Yugo.

"And you overrode your vortex inhibitor?"

"Yeah, yeah, yeah," said Yugo, waving his hand at Mr. Spock. "I've done all that. But we are still here."

"That can only mean one thing," said Mr. Spock.

"Yes, of course," said Sherlock Holmes. "It's elementary."

"And what might that be?" asked Sam. "It's not that elementary to me."

Mr. Spock cocked another eyebrow at Sam. "Perhaps I should start at the beginning and explain the nature of this world and how it relates to your own. All of the people and places in this world derive from the imagination of people in your world. When enough people start to believe that someone, or someplace, or something is real tremendous pressure builds as the universe struggles to make it real. That pressure is released here. The people, places and things you imagine become real here.

"In recent years, for some reason I have yet to understand, the forces that keep our worlds apart have weakened. That weakness made it easier for your unstable reactor core to breach the gap between the two dimensions. That weakness has also allowed things from this world to go to yours."

"You're saying there are make believe people walking around on Earth?" asked Iggy.

"Yes, I am," said Mr. Spock. "You see, the ability to cross over works both ways. Whenever enough people in your world believe someone is real, they come to life here. As more and more people accept that a make believe person is actually real, that person is drawn across the gulf between the dimensions and manifests in your world."

"There are a great many examples," interjected Sherlock Holmes. He started to count off on his long thin fingers, "There's the Loch Ness Monster, the Sasquatch, and, of course, the entire British royal family. None of them are real. All of them are make believe. They only exist because enough people believe they are real. I expect that if your people stopped believing in them, they would all cease to exist."

"But how does this explain why we can't get home?" asked Yugo.

Mr. Spock continued. "The instability between the two dimensions has caused them to move closer together. You could not create a new gateway to your world by reversing the process because your world is not where you left it."

"Then how do we get back?" asked Sam.

"Quite easily," said Mr. Spock. "It is not necessary to reverse the process to create a new gateway, because the gateway opened by your arrival is still there." He pointed to the purple spot still visible in the northern sky. It seemed to have gotten considerably bigger. "You just need to go back through it."

"Well, what are we waiting for," said Sam. "Let's get going!"

Yugo shifted in his seat. "It's not quite as simple as all that, is it?" he asked. "If our worlds are getting closer together, and the gateway between them is growing, anybody can crossover."

"It's even worse than that," said Sherlock Holmes. "Soon the two dimensions will completely overlap and become one. When that happens, everything in this world will become real in yours. All of the people, places and things mankind has ever imagined will be real."

"Unfortunately, the human imagination is not always a pleasant thing," said Mr. Spock. "Many of the creatures of your imagination are quite horrible indeed."

Iggy thought of the sounds they had heard in the Haunted Forest. He shuddered. "What can we do?" he asked.

"We need to understand why the two realities are coming together," said Sherlock Holmes. "Mr. Spock and I hoped that the three of you, as travelers from the other reality, might be able to shed some light on the problem."

"Guys, we do not have time for this," said Sam. "Christmas is only a couple of days away and we're already late."

"Sam, we can't leave now," said Iggy. "We have to do something. The fate of the world depends upon it."

"But what difference can we make? We're just three elves!" countered Sam.

"But we're three elves with an attitude," said Yugo.

"And a really rockin' snowmobile," added Iggy.

Sam sighed. It was clearly hopeless. His friends obviously had their hearts set on saving the world, as usual; and as usual, there was going to be no stopping them. The worst part was that he knew that before all of this was over he was going to have to climb back into that wretched snowmobile.

Mr. Spock was rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "Sam," he asked, "just what is this Christmas of which you speak?" He pronounced the word 'Christmas' very carefully. He even pronounced the *T*.

"You don't know what Christmas is?" Sam asked Mr. Spock. "Where are you from, outer space?"

"Well, actually, yes, I am," replied Mr. Spock.

For a change, Sam was at a loss for words. Iggy spoke up. "Christmas is the best time of the entire year. It's the one time when people all over the world stop thinking of themselves first and start thinking of others. It's a time for giving and sharing. There's no other time like it."

"And we work for the boss of Christmas himself: Santa Claus," said Yugo.

"Santa Claus?" queried Mr. Spock.

"Oh come on," said Sam. "Everyone has heard of Santa Claus. You know: big fat guy; dresses in red; making a list, checking it twice; coming down the chimney with toys for all the good little girls and boys; Ho Ho Ho and all that?"

Mr. Spock looked back at Iggy and Yugo. "I'm afraid that your friend's behavior is very illogical," he said.

"What Sam is trying to say," explained Iggy, "is that our boss, Santa Claus is a kind and generous man who delivers toys to children all over the world each Christmas. We work in his toy factory."

"You're saying this Santa Claus delivers toys to all of the children in the world each Christmas?" asked Mr. Spock. He still pronounced Christmas with a *T*.

"Not all of them, just the good ones," said Sam.

"It sounds like a daunting task. It hardly seems possible," said Mr. Spock.

"Indeed," mused Sherlock Holmes, "it scarcely seems *real*."

"You know, I remember reading something about this Santa Claus in grade school," said Dr. Watson.

"Silence Watson," said Sherlock Holmes. He strode across the room and lifted a violin from its resting place on the mantle. He placed it under his chin and played a few doleful notes.

"He always does that when he's thinking," said Dr. Watson to Sam.

"He should take some lessons," said Sam. "He's not very good."

"I try not to discourage him," said Dr. Watson. "He's been trying to give up smoking, and this helps to distract him."

"You know Dr. Watson," said Goldie,¹⁰ "I remember learning about Santa Claus in school too. I'd forgotten all about it. What do you suppose ever happened to him?"

"I don't know," said Dr. Watson. "I had always thought he was make believe."

Sherlock Holmes stopped playing in the middle of a particularly sour note. "That's it Watson! Santa Claus is make believe!"

"Oh, good one, Sherlock," said Sam. "But haven't you been listening? Santa Claus is real. I know. I work for him. If you'd ever been chewed out by Santa for playing hooky, you'd know he was real, too."

¹⁰ You forgot that she was in the room, didn't you?

"Yes, yes," said Sherlock Holmes, crossing the room excitedly. "He's obviously make believe. He's obviously imaginary. He's obviously made up. But he's become real *in your world.*"

"You mean..." said Yugo.

"Precisely!" said Sherlock Holmes. "Santa Claus was imagined in your world. That made him real here. In time enough people believed he was real and ..."

"He crossed over," said Mr. Spock. "And he took Christmas with him, leaving no Christmas in this world. If Christmas is as important as young Iggy suggests, this could explain the instability between the dimensions."

"You mean..." said Yugo.

"Exactly," said Mr. Spock. "The loss of Christmas in this reality has created some type of gap or emptiness and this dimension has drawn closer to yours..."

"In order to fill that void!" concluded Sherlock Holmes.

"Brilliant Holmes!" shouted Dr. Watson.

"It's simplicity itself," said Sherlock Holmes. "Now all we must do is restore Christmas to this reality, and the threat will be over."

Mr. Spock returned to the drawing room window and looked outside. The purple spot had grown dramatically and now filled half of the sky. "We are going to have to work quickly," he said. "I calculate the time remaining before the two realities overlap is only twelve minutes fourteen point two seconds. It will be impossible to separate them once the two realities have merged.

"All right Brainiac," said Sam. "Just how do you reckon you are going to get Santa Claus and Christmas back and restore balance to the universe in the next twelve minutes?"

"Twelve minutes, six point nine seconds," corrected Mr. Spock.

"We'll just have to think of something," said Sherlock Holmes, reaching for his violin.

Iggy had been sitting quietly on the sofa for some time, but now he spoke. "Christmas isn't a thing. It's a state of mind. Christmas exists in our world because people believe in it."

"Yes, Iggy," said Sherlock Holmes, lowering his violin, "just as Santa Claus exists because people believe in him."

"So, to bring Christmas here, all we have to do is persuade enough of the people of this world to believe in it!" concluded Iggy.

"Yes," said Sherlock Holmes, "but we don't have much time."

"Eleven minutes thirteen point five seconds, to be exact," said Mr. Spock.

"Then we must hurry. There is always a large crowd at the town square this time of day," said Sherlock Holmes. "Come Watson, the game is afoot!"

Sam turned to Dr. Watson, "what is he talking about?"

"Oh, he always says that," said Dr. Watson. "I don't pay much attention to it."

Sherlock Holmes grabbed his pipe and his deerstalker cap and led the others down the 17 steps. He turned at the base of the steps and exited through the back door. The little company ran across an alley and between two buildings. Then they found themselves at the end of a large park. At its center was a tall green pole. At the bottom of the pole was a small round platform where a man in a toga was speaking surrounded by nearly a thousand engrossed spectators.

"This is the May Pole," explained Sherlock Holmes. "Tradition dictates that anyone standing on the podium must be given an audience."

"So who is that now," asked Iggy.

"Oh, that's just Odysseus. He's always hanging around the May Pole looking for a chance to blabber about some boat trip he took once," answered Goldie. By now the group had reached the platform.

Mr. Spock glanced at a small square object in his hand. "Seven minutes, fifty six point six seconds," he said.

Goldie marched onto the stage and stepped in front of Odysseus. "Story's over, sailor boy," she said, grabbing the microphone from his hand.

Odysseus turned red in the face. "Of all the impertinence," he stammered. "I was just about to tell the tale of my encounter with the sirens."

"Just back off, or you'll be hearing sirens, all right," said Goldie. Odysseus moved to reclaim the microphone, but a well-aimed elbow from Goldie caused him to fall to his

knees and roll off the platform. Goldie reached over and pulled Iggy towards her. She handed him the microphone. Behind them, the purple dot had grown to fill the whole sky.

"All right, Iggy," she said. "Time to tell everyone all about Christmas. And you better make it snappy, we've only got ..."

"Six minutes, forty four point four seconds," finished Mr. Spock.

At the side of the platform, Sherlock Holmes was engaged in a discussion with a large muscular man, dressed in blue tights and a red cape.

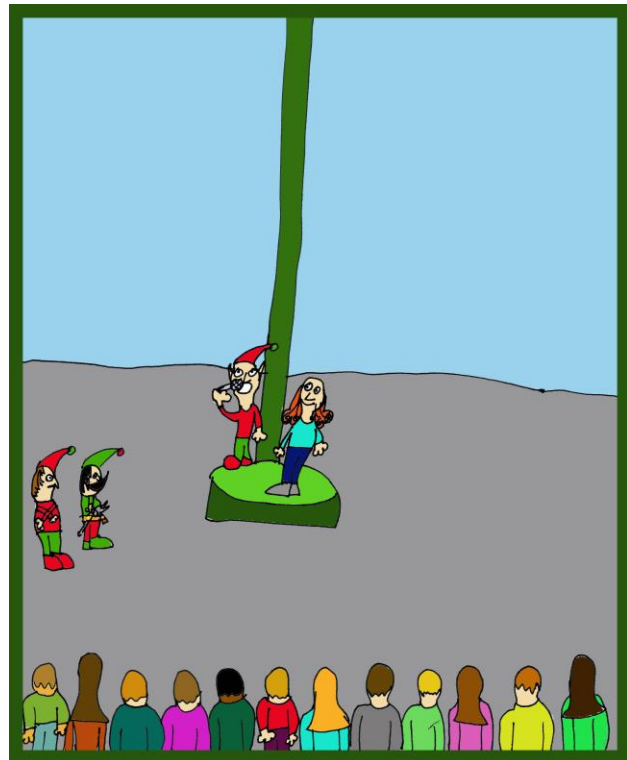
"Yes, of course. I'll spread the word," said the muscular man. He flexed his enormous legs and leapt into the air. He turned and flew across the square at a tremendous rate of speed. Yugo and Sam stared dumfounded as he disappeared from view.

"How fast do you reckon he was going?" murmured Sam.

"I don't know," answered Yugo. "Faster than a speeding bullet, that's for sure."

Meanwhile, on the platform, Iggy stared out at the hundreds of faces looking back at him. Many of them appeared familiar to him in a vague way. He raised the microphone slowly to his lips and cleared his throat gently. He began talking with no real idea of what he was going to say.

"Everybody. Please listen to me. This world as you know it is about to end." He gestured at the great purple wall that spread across the horizon behind him. "In a few minutes this light will sweep over us and change everything. But we can't waste our last moments thinking only of ourselves. Now we have to think about and treasure those things that are really most important to us. Our families. Our friends. It's time to think about sharing."



There was a panicked rumble that spread through the crowd. "Five minutes, thirty point zero seconds," said Mr. Spock.

Iggy cleared his throat again and went on. He told the crowd about sharing. He told the crowd about giving. He told the crowd about Christmas. And about Santa Claus. He explained that now they needed Christmas. They needed to make it real.

"And the only way you can make it real, is to believe," he finished. The crowd looked at him in silence. Then, for the first time in centuries, they believed. They believed in Christmas and *Christmas became real*.

In the distance, ever so faintly, Iggy could hear the sound of bells. Jingle bells.

He spun around. The purple wall, which was about to engulf them was receding and shrinking. A cheer rang out from the crowd. Something wet fell on Iggy's hand. He looked down. It was a snowflake.

A snowflake in the middle of summer. Christmas had become real.

Sam grabbed Iggy's collar and pulled him off of the stage. "Come on, we have to get out of here." He pointed to the purple spot. It was shrinking rapidly, like a hot air balloon blowing over the horizon.

"Thank you Iggy," said Goldie, hugging him tightly.

Iggy pried himself loose. "I've got to go," he said. Yugo and Sam were already running across the square.

"Run Iggy," said Mr. Spock. "I calculate that the gateway will close in two minutes five point seven seconds."

Iggy ran. He caught up to Yugo and Sam as they ran into the alley behind Baker Street. They emerged on the other side and scrambled into the snowmobile. Yugo flipped a few switches, turned a few dials and punched a flashing red button. The snowmobile jerked forward. Yugo pulled into the center of Baker Street and floored the fusion pedal. The reactor roared to life.

The snowmobile raced along the street in the direction of the purple spot, which was rising high into the air as it dwindled away. Yugo pulled a green lever. There was a smooth hydraulic noise and two gleaming silver wings extended from either side of the snowmobile. The rose gently from the pavement and climbed into the air.

"I have not tested the flight mode, yet," said Yugo. "Better hang on tight." He steered towards the fading purple dot, which seemed to slide from side to side. Yugo

followed its motion. It was now the same size as the snowmobile, but before it could shrink any smaller, he guided the snowmobile through it and into another place.

Home.

The snowmobile burst through the little spot and flew across the frozen landscape that surrounded the North Pole. Behind them the dot shrank to nothing, and disappeared with a faint pop.



Yugo brought the snowmobile to a landing just outside the recreation building at the edge of the little village that surrounded Santa Claus' toy factory. The three elves stepped out of the snowmobile. Sam fell to his knees and kissed the snow.

"I never expected to be so happy to be cold," he said.

Iggy and Yugo laughed. They helped Sam up and brushed the snow from his pants. "Let's go inside," said Iggy.

They were greeted at the door by another elf named Eggo. He was a small man¹¹ with a red tunic and green trousers. "You're just in time," he said. "Channel 67 is about to show the old *Star Trek* Christmas special. It's the one where Spock and McCoy travel back through time and meet Sherlock Holmes. It's a classic!"

Iggy just shrugged and followed Yugo and Sam inside.

¹¹ But then, what elf isn't? Tall elves are called 'people'.

EPILOGUE

The realm of the imagination exists. You do not need a leaky reactor to get there, but it helps. It has Christmas now, so it is generally a happier place.

There was only one unfortunate consequence of the whole adventure. When the two dimensions nearly merged, it enabled many make believe people to cross over into our world. Among the imaginary people that now walk among us are: O.J. Simpson, Kato Kaelin, Jacques Parizeau, Micheal Jackson, the producers of *Barney and Friends*, Sylvester Stallone, Michael Bolton, Lucien Bouchard, Barbara Walters, Quentin Tarantino, Pamela Lee, Regis and Kathie Lee, Oprah, Geraldo, Sally, Ricki, Jenny, Phil, Shirley, Montel, Tempestt and all of their guests.

There is good news. If you stop believing in them, they will cease to exist.

MERRY CHRISTMAS.