

A Kringle in Time

I have endeavoured in this Ghostly little book, to raise the Ghost of an Idea, which shall not put my readers out of humour with themselves, with each other, with the season, or with me. May it haunt their houses pleasantly, and no one wish to lay it.

– Charles Dickens

S. John Ross

Writing, Design, Cartography,
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Santa Claus

Technical Consultant

With Special Thanks

... to Robin Jenkins and Spike Y. Jones, for being Kringle's editorial shepherds, abiding their flock by night

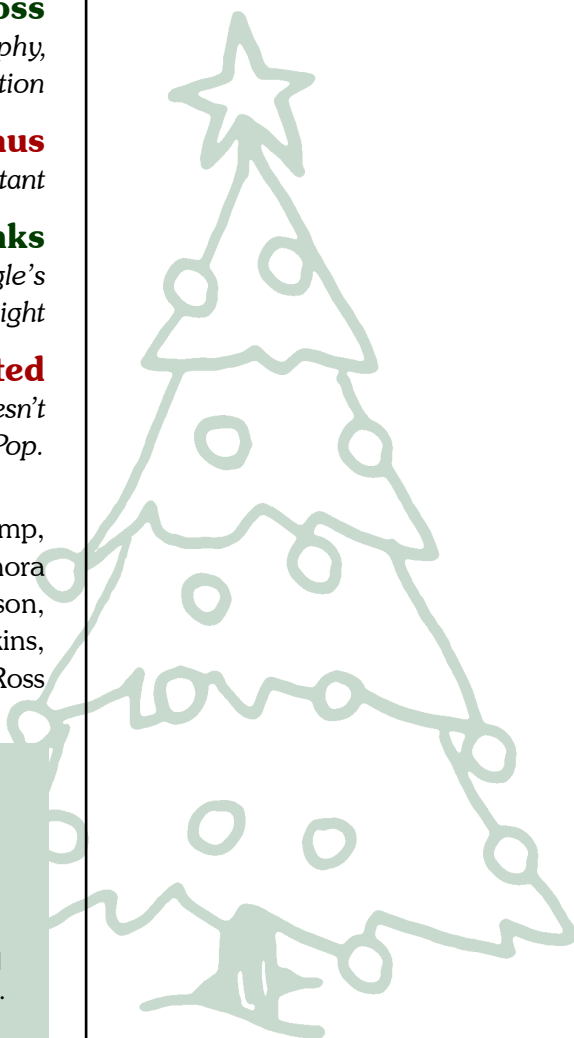
Dedicated

... To Sam Ross, my Dad, who likes to pretend he doesn't care much about the holidays. Love you, Pop.

Playtest & Useful Commentary: Paul Blotkamp, Timothy O. Driscoll, Barb Fischer, Brian Flanagan, Vanora Hagen, Guy Hoyle, Dave Insel, Ken "Muscles" Johnson, Tim Kirk, Shawn Lockard, Doug Milewski, Rob Perkins, Paul Reed, Cody Reichenau, and Sandra Ross

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Allergen Alert: the Kringle in Time playtest process involved snack foods that may have included peanuts, wheat, soy and dairy products. Cease play immediately if symptoms manifest.



A Christmas Story

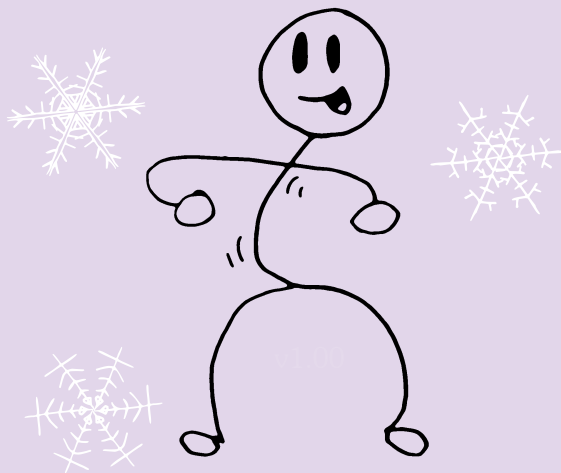
IT WAS ABOUT TWELVE YEARS ago, and it was the first Christmas after I'd begun work on *A Kringle in Time*. I was single in those days, which isn't nearly as good as being married but had its charms. That year, the charms included a wild little thing named (or, perhaps, not named) Melina. A mutual friend who took naughty photographs professionally introduced us; he and Melina had a business relationship.

Like just about any relationship at that age, it was a pretty dumb idea that was fun enough that – for a while anyway – we didn't care how dumb it was. It was Christmastime in Virginia, in a town that takes pride in its Colonial heritage, complete with a really beautifully *complete* approach to the holidays. There was snow and there were lights and there were more pine boughs and pinecones and holly whatsits than anyone could take in at once.

Melina and I were at the local shopping mall that day, doing Melina-style things, which meant shoplifting Play-Doh from the toy stores. Melina was a thief and an exhibitionist and wicked in many other nice ways, so it was a fun contrast in an environment of plastic-sheet snowscapes and the electric grinding noise of mechanical elves.

There is a cliché on television that says that department store Santas often fail to show up for work, leaving the harried staff to hunt for an emergency replacement Santa to talk to the kiddies and hand out candy and pose for Polaroids. That Christmas, that magical Christmas, that cliché visited our little shopping mall at precisely the time Melina and I were passing the Santa station. Melina noticed, and Melina's eyes lit up with a flame from the pit of whatever dimension of sin she served. She whispered something in my ear, and some of it involved a pleading request. Oh, would I? Would I *please* be Santa?

Not only did the staff eagerly accept me (I was the only volunteer) but they accepted Melina as a kind of "Santa's Helper" character. They provided her with a checkered apron and a green elf hat. Again, it was a study in contrasts, since she was wearing shiny black pants so tight they were really just a new skin color with a belt.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

S. John Ross has been a Game Master since 1984 and game writer since 1990. His works include the **Points in Space** series, **Risus: The Anything RPG**, the **Pokéthulhu Adventure Game**, **GURPS Russia**, **GURPS Warehouse 23**, **Weirder Tales: A Space Opera**, **Feast of Blades (the In Nomine GM's Kit)**, **Among the Clans: The Andorians**, **Uresia: Grave of Heaven**, the **Star Trek RPG Narrator's Toolkit**, and the creation of **Sparks** paper miniatures. As a contributor, his work has appeared in other supplements for the lines mentioned above, as well as the Flying Buffalo's **CityBook** series, White Wolf's **Mage: The Ascension** line, and numerous periodicals, including *Dragon*, *White Wolf*, *Star Wars Gamer*, *Autoduel Quarterly*, and *Pyramid* (where he served a brief stint as Editor). His homepage, The Blue Room, includes the **Big List of RPG Plots**, one of the most linked-to gaming tools on the World Wide Web. He recently celebrated his seventh wedding anniversary to the cutest Newfie in the world.



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Things weren't going to be so easy for me. I was ushered discreetly into the private concrete back-halls of the shopping mall where I was provided with extra padding, a massive fake beard, the boots and the coat and the trousers and the rest of it. Everywhere I walked I was surrounded by the mall's answer to the Secret Service, and as we strode out into the public concourse again I felt like some kind of overprotected rock star on the way to the stage.

The children cheered when they saw me, and that was one of many lessons I'd learn that evening. Whatever there may be to Christmas Magic, people do love an icon and, for a moment, there I was being iconic.

Another pleasant lesson involved just how many of the children asked for *traditional* toys. I was expecting a litany of brand-name trademarks and video-game machines, but more than half of the kids asked for toys along the lines of a toy gun or a wagon or a train set or a dolly or a teddy bear. That really affected me; it was an absolute surprise and it made me realize that I had allowed a film of cynicism to cloud a holiday that I really truly love.

A less pleasant lesson happened when I got thirsty. I lifted the fake beard to drink and three of the Mall Secret Service people all but tackled me to the ground. There is a rule about being Santa Claus, and it's a very serious rule: When you're Santa Claus you're Santa Claus. The children must never see you as anything else.

There was, too, the little girl who was *terrified* of me, and screamed and screamed incessantly until her father told her it was time to take the picture. She immediately stopped screaming, smiled sweetly for the camera, and waited for the snaps. When the pictures were done, she immediately resumed screaming. When we were done, she stopped screaming long enough to accept the prefab bag of candy and small Taiwanese plastic toys, gave me an equally sweet "Thank you!" and then wandered off happy. That girl has a future or (since this is twelve years later) a present.



I think some of the Mall Elves noticed what Melina was up to.

But I've left Melina out of the story for a while. Shame on me, for Melina got me into that suit and she was determined to have some fun with the situation beyond just seeing me play Santa for her amusement. At every opportunity, she got close, whispering to me and reminding me of what she was wearing that wasn't an apron, and what she *wasn't* wearing.

There is another rule about being Santa Claus, and it involves having a soft lap to sit on with no questionable unevenness in the surface. Melina hated rules. There is no moral (or indeed, morality) to this story, though as you read and play *A Kringle in Time* you'll come to appreciate why I've included it.

As a postscript, a few weeks later, just a day or three before Christmas, I was loading up at a salad bar when a woman I didn't recognize just started staring at me and smiling. "Santa!" she said. "It's Santa Claus!"

I blinked a lot. "Yes? Okay. Yeah."

She had recognized my laugh. She told me that the photograph they had of me and her children would be a treasured family photo, always. I was the best Santa she'd ever seen, she said. And then I remembered all those hundreds of Polaroids from that day, and it hit me that there I was, in family photo albums all over town.

It's a kind of Rock Star Meaning of Christmas, but it felt pretty good anyway.

Melina and I broke up when she had that idea about the car battery. But I wish her (wherever she is) and those kids with the train sets and wagons and dolls, and the Mall Secret Service, and my adorable wife who's very generous in allowing me to recount this story, a very Merry Christmas indeed.

S. John Ross

S. John Ross
Thanksgiving Weekend, 2004
Austin, Texas

Getting Started

TO USE A BEWHISKERED CLICHÉ, the holiday season means a lot of things to a lot of people. For some, it's the pristine beauty of a snow-custed country evening, warmed by a comfortable helping of mulled wine. For others, it's the rat-race of an adrenaline-charged City Christmas, with eager shoppers in search of unique playthings to give to each other. To many, it means placing familiar objects lovingly on a tree, and gathering with family to forget the worries of an ailing world for a few days.

Christmas is *not* – traditionally – a time of high adventure and danger.

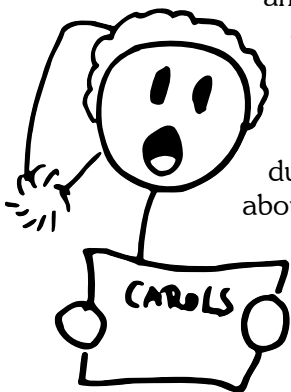
But there was a Christmas (not too long ago) when something extraordinary happened. When a handful of people came face to face with the magic of Christmas. They knew that this was the *true* magic of Christmas, so they killed it. This is their tale.

Or rather, it's yours. For, like any legend, this Christmas story has thus far been more about the truth than the facts, so there are many questions left unanswered. Who were these people, called upon to save Christmas? Did they really pull it off? Was there sex? Were there Vikings?

To find the answers, a little exploring is called for – a journey that puts a bullet into every Christmas icon that we hold dear. And you just might find that you learn the *true* meaning of Christmas along the way. You've been warned.

This is an adventure about saving Christmas from ancient evil. This is an adventure about murdering Santa Claus for his own good (seven times). This is

an adventure about shopping, and family, and eggnog, and Jesus Christ, who appears here courtesy of the Almighty God, along with his robot duplicate. This is an adventure about the stress of fast-food employment, the grandeur of world-domination plans, the difficulty of pronouncing things in Welsh, and about toys nobody wants.



ADVENTURES ON RISUS EARTH: THE LITTLEST WORLDBOOK

This adventure takes place in the **Risusiverse** [ree-SUSS-ih-verss], specifically on **Risus Earth**. The features of **Risus Earth** are as follows:

It's just like modern-day Earth ...

... Except all genres are true. None are particularly dominant, though, so on many days they just cancel each other out and life takes on a convincing semblance of normalcy. This makes most people pretty nervous.

While the superheroes and mad scientists and zombies and things are clearly fallout from the truth of all genres, there are occasional deviations from the real world that can't be blamed on any genre in particular. For example, Vaduz Castle, Liechtenstein, is nineteen inches taller than in the real world, affording a marginally more magnificent view of the Rhine.



What this means is: every movie, play, video game (etcetera) that takes place in some version of the modern world is a depiction of **Risus Earth**. Those that take place in the past or future are depictions of **Risus Earth** as it once was, or as it will be. Those that don't take place on Earth at all depict other worlds in the **Risus Galaxy** or the **Risus Dimensions**. Similarly, every book at your local library or bookstore is a sourcebook providing more information on the **Risusiverse**.

Be cautioned that many scholars, journalists, novelists, scientists, filmmakers and historians have no formal training as RPG engineers and can't be trusted on important matters of accuracy or game balance. Use your best judgment and, if in doubt, ask your Game Master.

Those responsible for depictions of the **Risusiverse** should please remit royalties to Cumberland Games & Diversions. Many of you are long overdue on your payments. I'm looking at you, Ovid.

CAPTAIN DASHER, MAGIC REINDEER

Description: Dasher is the charismatic, easy-going leader of Santa's elite squad of Magic Reindeer. He's proud of his position, and is a good leader to the rest of the team. They've all been doing this for years, now, and Dasher is one of the most respected citizens in the North Pole. With the party, he's a casual, competent NPC, always willing to dole out a helpful bit of information or hedge the PCs in a direction the GM wants them to go (or to spring into action if needed). He's cool and suave, in an edgy sort of way, and heroic, as shaggy quadrupeds go. He's even something of a lady's man.

Clichés: Christmas Icon (3), Action Hero (4), Beast of Burden (4)

MAGIC REINDEER (THE OTHER SEVEN)

Description: Santa's elite team of speed-demons, the Magic reindeer are a strange and fun-loving lot. Their turn-ons include vacuum cleaners, red flannel and soft mints. Their turn-offs are bad breath and a closed mind. Their ideal date would start off with a quick flight over a frosty moon, and end up with a long walk on the beach, just to talk. Use these stats for Dancer, Prancer, Vixen, Comet, Cupid, Donner and Blitzen.

Clichés: Christmas Icon (3), Beast of Burden (4), Big Fan of Dasher (3)

GAMING IS EDUCATIONAL!

The reindeer, *rangifer tarandus*, is also called a caribou.

Typical reindeer live in subarctic tundra regions, instead of at the North Pole.

The color of a reindeer's coat varies from chestnut-brown to snow-white by season and locale.

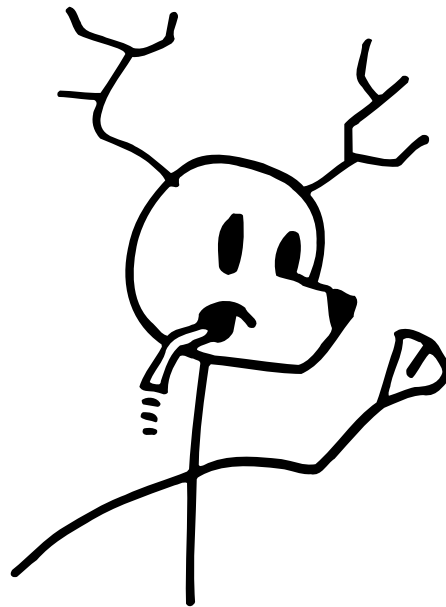
Male reindeer can weigh upwards of 700 pounds.

Reindeer enjoy guitars, long walks on the beach, unfiltered cigarettes, and Snapple.

There are very few beaches in the subarctic tundra regions, so most reindeer live with the constant nagging sense that something important is missing from their lives.

Some compensate by devoting themselves to orgiastic Satanic rituals and the Dark Arts.

Devil-possessed reindeer have brightly luminescent noses.



What To My Wondering Eyes Should Appear

Dasher, the lead Reindeer, casually tosses out a pack of Camels and taps one free. He offers them around to the PCs as well, and then goes the rounds with his lighter. After taking a few long, heavy drags on his cigarette (Reindeer have big lungs) he'll crush it out and exhale quietly. All of the weapons in bar will slowly lower to sides or find holsters again, and the people who had been so tensely aiming them will start muttering in confusion. There is *magic* in the air, despite Dasher's apparent determination to ruin it by doing some kind of James Dean routine.

As you've guessed, the PCs have come face to face with none other than (sing along) Dasher and Dancer and Prancer and Vixen, Comet and Cupid and Donner and Blitzen – those very same “tiny Reindeer” that pull Santa's magic sleigh every Christmas Eve. Your more alert players will probably recall that *this* is Christmas Eve, and these Reindeer are *not* currently pulling a sleigh, magical or otherwise. They aren't *tiny*, either.

“The sleigh's on the roof,” they'll say, if asked.

“The whole ‘tiny’ thing's a myth,” they'll explain.

“Santa's been split into avatars of evil and couldn't make it,” they'll add, if the topic comes up. They'll make sure that it does.

SECRET STUFF FOR THE GM TO KNOW

The Reindeer, Mrs. Claus and the Elf Rebellion are the good guys. If you like making the PCs feel paranoid, though, there will be plenty of other people eager to stab them in the back soon enough.

Pervert Santa and Gluttonous Santa are on the mission in New York. They're trying to undermine the commercial side of Christmas by destroying the toy-retail industry (using nuclear weaponry) and by giving away any toys that survive the carnage.

Avaricious and Angry Santa are in Victorian London and Wales, respectively. Their mission got complicated when they weren't getting along. Too complicated to get into in this sidebar; see page 33. For now, rest secure in the knowledge that it involves black magic, giant tentacular elder beings, and Ebenezer Scrooge.

Stuck-Up and Lazy Santa are teamed up in Jerusalem in the time of King Herod (which is to say, around the time Christ is due to be born in a manger in Bethlehem). It's as bad as it sounds, and probably worse, once you mix in the telepathic alien weapons engineers and a conspiracy of cannibals intending to make the baby Jesus into an entrée.

Unbeknownst to the good guys, the busy little Clauses have already done some damage in other places and times, and the fabric of reality is already beginning to unravel. Given the nature of **Risus Earth**, nobody's noticed yet.

Envious Santa is the boss Santa, but he's the pawn of something even more sinister.

Dasher (after crushing out his cigarette and ordering a Heineken) will recount all of the parts of the story that he can remember, occasionally glaring at one of the other reindeer when they interrupt.

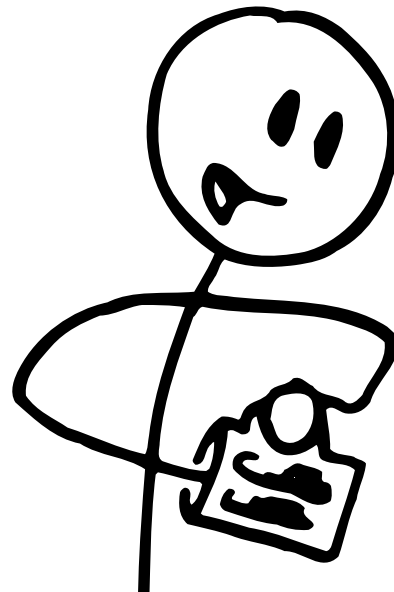
If Every Day Were Just Like Christmas

The North Pole is a beautiful place, a magical realm of peppermint stuff and sugarplum thingamajigs. Happy Elves spend the days in the workshops making toys for all the good little boys and girls. Santa and Mrs. Claus are loved and respected by all. Santa manages the toyworks, and Mrs. Claus makes cookies for the Elves. It's a great place to live. Or at least, it was.

The Christmas job is a tough one. Santa Claus has the burden of keeping a naughty/nice morality index on every person in the world (and on many worlds the PCs may not be aware of). He also has to distribute gifts accordingly. Production, research, transport, quality control, labor negotiations, insurance hassles ... it's a very high-stress position for one man to handle, especially when he's expected to stay jolly. It requires a lot of work, and (most importantly) Christmas Magic.

Christmas Magic is the *most powerful force for unselfish good in the universe*. It comes from all corners of reality, and can take many forms. Santa's job is to direct it, to make it blanket everything in the holiday mood once a year. He is, in that capacity, something of a sorcerer, a white wizard of magnificent power and almost holy responsibility.

Earlier this year, something went terribly wrong. Santa and his usual entourage (some Elves, small Disneyesque animals, animated gingerbread men and so on) descended into the top-secret Christmas Magic Laboratory, clipboards in hand, to begin work on a new project. Everyone seemed very excited. Someone in Santa's organization had found a new wrinkle, of sorts, in Christmas Magic. But the wrinkle must have been dangerous, because there was a terrible explosion which reduced the laboratory complex to a burning pile of ginger-snaps (a typical North Pole building material).



*It doesn't matter where you leave the tip;
Antonio is not a proud man.*

Chapter Two: Debacle on 34th Street

"Why all of the sudden is the sketch dirty?"

*"Child molestation is a tricky subject
with the affiliates."*

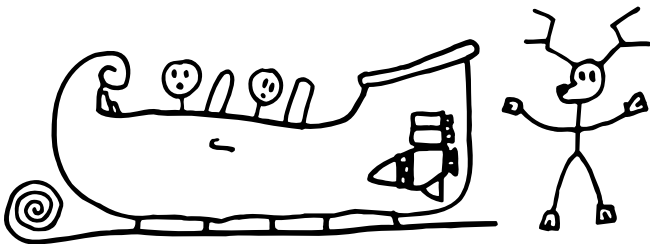
"Read the papers! Half the country's doing it!"

"Yes, but you name names."

"We don't name names. We say 'The Pope.'"

– Hannah And Her Sisters

ONCE THE REINDEER HAVE THE PCs on board for the mission, they get them on board the sleigh – that's Santa's very own, stolen by the Elf rebellion. It's on the roof of Antonio's, and with a wink and a sparkle, the PCs are, too.



Constructed in orbital spacedock above San Francisco by crews of specially-trained Elves, Santa's Sleigh can reach Mach 4 in 2.6 seconds.

The sleigh is *impressive*. Beyond the old-fashioned painted-wood-and-scrollwork hull, it features a transtemporal circuit with a 700-chronopulse output, auxiliary rocket boosters, a powerful onboard computer system with a database library and a fast net connection, radar, ladar, naughtydar, nicedar, plasma video with more than a thousand digitally-archived movies, wet bar, capacious rear cargo area, and two wide benches with generous cushions, and luxuriant leather upholstery. Describe it to the PCs in general terms, then read the following Groovy Boxed Text:

One seat, in particular, looks *very* well-used. Dasher looks at the broadly-depressed cushions with sad reverence, and Blitzen sheds a tear and chokes back a sob. "That's – that's Santa's butt ..." Blitzen begins to weep quietly "God I'm gonna miss the big guy" and the other reindeer fight to hold back the tears. Dancer and Prancer both give Blitzen a hug.

Dasher, ever the leader, motions with his antlers, and the reindeer begin harnessing themselves for the trip. He nods to you: "One of you has to fill Santa's shoes. So to speak. I'll leave it up to you." He drops onto all fours, and settles into the lead harness.

Once the PCs have seated up, the Reindeer will begin pulling, carrying the sleigh upward, gently, into the swirling snows. At this point, the PCs might ask: where they are headed, again? Dasher can talk to them through a team-to-pilot intercom system (built into the harness). He'll tell them they're off to New York City in [the year in which you're GMing this adventure]. "We're pretty sure one of the Santa duos is somewhere in the Big Apple ... and we're pretty sure Pervert Santa is one of the team ... we're not sure of much beyond that. The rest is up to you guys."

With that, the snow will begin swirling more rapidly, and then glow. When the snow stops glowing, the PCs can make out the well-lit monoliths of Manhattan beneath them. It's four days before Christmas, local time, just past sunset.

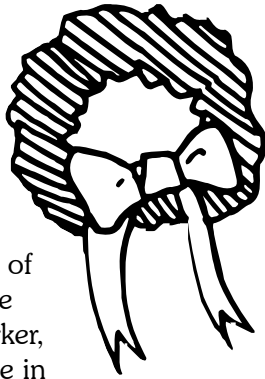
GAMING IS EDUCATIONAL!

At any given moment, one in three people in New York City are from out of town.

A Sleigh Ride Together With You

The PCs should decide where in New York City they want to come down and start exploring. They should keep in mind that their goal is to find a couple of Santa Clauses (yes, there are *hundreds* of them in the city – they want a *real* one).

If any of the PCs is from modern-day **Risus Earth** (or somewhere close), they'll probably know the major parts of the city from watching TV. If the PCs include an actual New Yorker, he'll know even more. If no-one in the group fits this description, the Reindeer will help out. If you don't mind fudging a bit, any mutants or talking slimes could very realistically be from north Jersey. Some spots that might come to mind:



- **The Bronx:** The Bronx depicted in the popular media is a violent, dangerous neighborhood of liquor stores, iron gratings and missing hubcaps. By a curious coincidence, the real Bronx is a violent, dangerous neighborhood of liquor stores, iron gratings and missing hubcaps. This time of year, colored lights can be seen in the liquor-store windows, blinking from behind the bars, lighting up lots of dirty snow.
- **Brooklyn and Queens:** These gigantic boroughs across the bridges from Manhattan are cities in their own right. Unless you're frantic for a good baseball card shop or a *Patty Duke Show* historian, there's little of interest beyond endless rows of dilapidated townhouses. La Guardia airport is here, just north of Queens proper and easily accessible from Grand Central Parkway. East of Queens is Long Island.
- **Chinatown:** Less Christmassy than the rest of Manhattan, New York's Chinatown is nevertheless a good potential area for funny NPC encounters. It's the world's single greatest source of Monosodium Glutamate.

SANTA'S SLEIGH: IT MEANS WHAT IT IS

Santa's sleigh is loaded down with electronic goodies that can access all sorts of information, both in the form of real-time sensors, huge databases, and an impossibly fast Internet connection. This is a gift for the harried Game Master carefully disguised as a gift for the harried Player Characters.

This adventure isn't about looking things up online or kicking back watching Santa's collection of *Girls Gone Wild* videos (he's been considering adding "wild" as a third category, he's beginning to regard it as something philosophically outside the box of "naughty" and "nice"). So, if the PCs start leaning toward letting the hardware do the adventuring for them, just slap some layers of encryption on the porn directories, a frustratingly complete child-friendly filter on the Web browser, and have a field of unexplained atmospheric radiation (on loan from a *Star Trek* episode) interfering with the sensors.

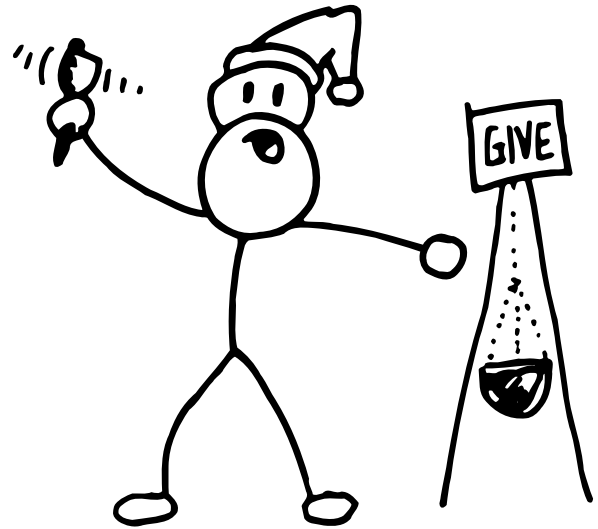
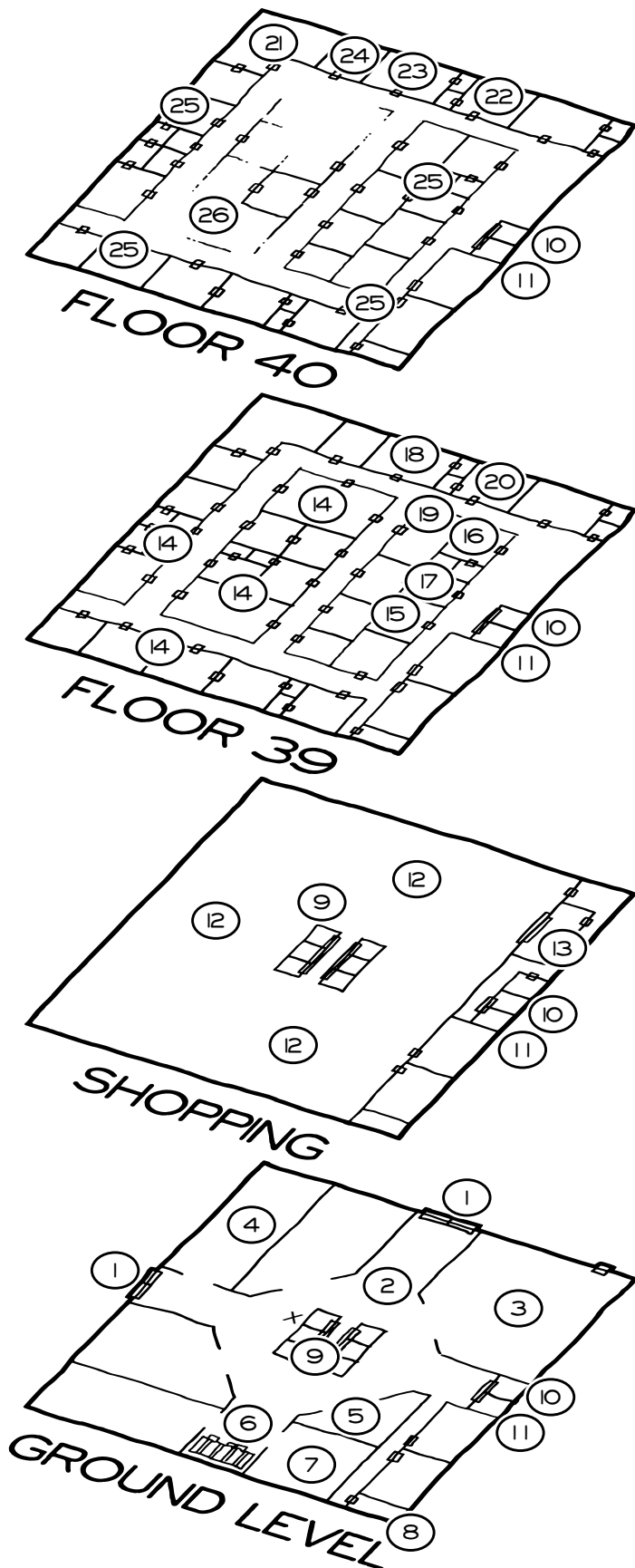


But, when you need to help the PCs along a little (their hopes are like a mouse for you to toy with, you wicked tomcat of a GM), the sleigh provides a useful alternative mouthpiece to Dasher and the reindeer team. Dasher and company *don't really know what's going on*, so the best they can do is offer their own guesses. Mrs. Claus and the Elf rebellion, on the other hand, are constantly learning, and the PCs can occasionally get a scratchy, distorted (heavily encrypted) signal from rebellion headquarters in the North Pole. New intelligence, new discoveries, new rubber chickens, in other words, to slap the players with should they need it.

The distorted signals are sent by Elf communications specialists, by the way, not by Mrs. Claus herself. Save Samantha 'til the final act.

One thing the sleigh *can* always provide is ready access to Santa's naughty/nice database. The PCs can feed anyone's name and address into the computer, and it will produce a little thumbs-up dingbat or a little thumbs-down one, as appropriate. The link to the *details* is mildly encrypted, but the Game Master might let any hacker-types breeze past it with a Difficulty of 15.

The sleigh's functions as a time machine don't work without Dasher's say-so. He likes the PCs, but he won't trust them with the power of time-travel beyond what he feels is strictly necessary to complete their task.



Map Key: Ground Floor

Area 1 – Sidewalk/Entrances: The sidewalks outside Keller’s are covered by giant awnings. Any character falling onto this awning, whether from the roof or out of a window, will be bounced harmlessly across the street into an office window, taking some nasty scratches from the glass and landing, but avoiding splatting onto the sidewalk. There are lots of glass doors here.

Area 2 – Open “Mall” Area: This is like a micro-shopping-mall, with large potted trees (covered with lights, of course), and open-doorway entrances to the various ground-floor businesses. A Salvation Army charity taker is on duty at the spot marked “X.” He’s dressed as Santa and is ringing his bell and being generally polite. Occasionally, reporters bother him in the hopes that he is, or knows, the Keller’s Santa. The PCs might bother him, too. He’s not a Drone unless it’d be cool for him to be a Drone, in which case he’s a Drone.

Area 3 – Empire State Savings and Loan: This is just a small branch of Keller’s bank. It’s a good place for the PCs to exchange their currency if they’re in from another planet or something.

Area 4 – McTreacher’s Fast Food: Specializing in fish-burgers and shrimp-sausage muffins, this newest addition to the fast food market thrives on how busy Keller’s is this time of year. They have large signs up proclaiming “Try Our Christmas Special, the Turkey Burger Combo Meal, for only

Of course, the PCs may still assume that *this* is Pervert Santa ... his white beard is real; he's got red long johns; he *totally* looks the part. If they wake and interrogate him, they'll simply get a terrified old codger with a head-patting fixation. He'll make the mistake of *acting* like a Santa, though, keeping up the "Ho! Ho!" business and so on. He'll only reveal his name if threatened in some way – he doesn't want to embarrass his brother. Don't worry if the PCs kill him by mistake; they'll meet the real Pervert Santa soon enough. Hiram knows that "something odd" is going on behind the scenes, but he prefers ignorance and he's been good at maintaining it.



Area 16 – Chamber of Delights: This chamber is full of odd sexual paraphernalia. Toys and tables and feathery handcuffs and things. There is a yak here, tethered to the wall and wearing a large leather bikini. It looks pleadingly at the PCs as if to say "please kill me quickly." This is where Pervert Santa goes to unwind after a hard day's plotting (plotting gets him feeling amorous ... but then again, a toothache would get him feeling amorous).

Area 17 – Tied-up Reindeer: This is a very out-of-place all-metal chamber, like the inside of a vault. Eerie green light comes from around the cracks of the huge steel door on the north wall. The room isn't empty: tied up and gagged in all corners of the room are the Reindeer! The whole gang, from Dasher on down. The PCs can untie them, and the Reindeer would certainly appreciate it if they would. Fortunately, nobody has dressed *them* in a leather bikini. Yet.

Dasher will (after rubbing his hooves for a bit to get the circulation going), tell the PCs that a veritable horde of the Santa-Drones attacked them and brought them here. If the reindeer were at the townhouse and the PCs have Philo with them, Philo will be terrified, and ask after his friends. The reindeer don't know – they were all knocked out by the bells and don't remember much beyond the initial attack. Comet is pretty sure that Santa has the sleigh now,

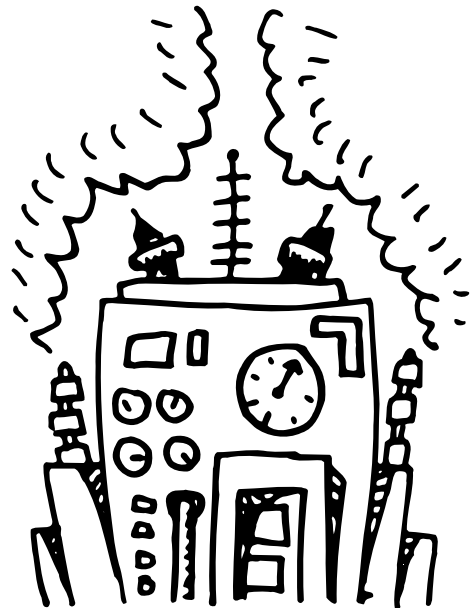
however (he either saw them take it, or heard Santa bragging about it, depending on how things went down).

Area 18 – Beckoning Cosmic Gateway

Machine Room: The door to this room is *tough* to open; it's heavily armored. Most clichés would face a Difficulty 30 or more to force it physically; the PCs will need to apply either security-cracking skills or high explosives. Lacking those, a strong PC could use Blitzen as a battering ram.

The steel vault-door, once breached, lets loose a flurry of pure snow into the room. Beyond it, a trail of glittering ice leads about twenty feet into a star-filled void, ending in a platform upon which stands a gigantic machine: A Beckoning Cosmic Gateway Generator (MkII, limited warranty version). The room has no walls; it just extends to a black, starry infinity. The machine is beaming a swirling green beam straight upwards into darkness.

This spiffy thing is generating a gateway above the roof of the store. It's currently keyed to some point in space time (London England, December 24th, 1843). PCs with appropriate mad-scientist abilities might be able to deduce this from the instruments, but there doesn't seem to be any way to alter its destination or deactivate it. It's made of an alien metal it would take weeks of battering to even dent. This is a pity, since the nexus almost certainly leads to the



This particular model of Beckoning Cosmic Gateway Machine works best when there's an Icy, Gibbous Moon

GRAVEYARD COMBAT TROUBLE (1D6)

1 – The character gets lost in the fog. Each turn he must try to beat a Difficulty 10 with his most “intelligent” cliché (or any cliché that implies tracking or navigating). If he succeeds, he re-enters the fray. If he fails, he must instead make a fresh roll on this table.

2 – The character stumbles backward into an open grave, taking a one-die smack of injury to whatever cliché he was using when he rolled the pair. Climbing out is Difficulty 10 for any athletic cliché, Difficulty 12-20 for less physical ones.

3 – As above, but the grave contains a zombie (in keeping with the season, its wearing a Santa hat). It has the cliché Zombie (2) and wants to eat the character, brains first.

4-5 – The character trips on a tree root and falls onto a Dark Spawn, knocking it into a nearby grave where a very hungry zombie immediately eats it. The Dark Spawn horde loses a die from their Grunt Squad cliché. The character takes a one-die injury from bursting some of the Dark Spawn’s acid bulbs.

6 – The character trips on a tree root, falls onto a Dark Spawn, and takes a one-die injury. The Dark Spawn knocks into another Dark Spawn, which knocks into another Dark Spawn, which knocks into another Player Character, delivering a one-die injury to him. That PC stumbles back, knocking into another random PC, shoving that PC into a grave with a zombie in it.

Peace On Earth

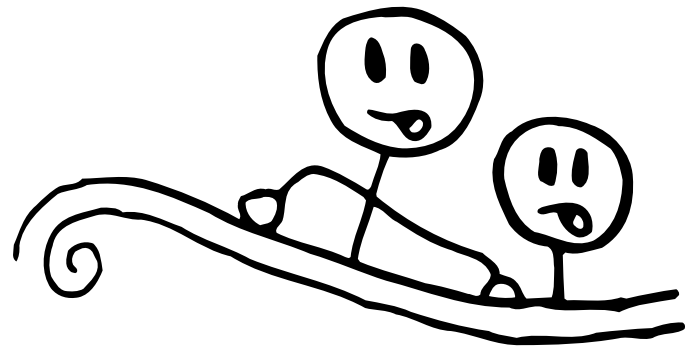
The gateway deposits everyone roughly onto the ground back in London. As the PCs wearily stand to brush themselves off, they hear a yelp from Avarice and the sound of several automatic weapons clicking and clattering into potentially violent positions. Dasher and the others have *immediately* tackled Santa and (armed with a stash of weapons nobody noticed before in the trunk of the sleigh) have him at gunpoint. Santa’s eyes are bugged out about three feet and Comet has his right forehoof planted directly in the big guy’s gut.

Blitzen, tossing the bullets from Santa’s revolver into the bushes, shouts to the party “Hey! We got ‘im fellas! Want we should bump him off right now, or just kill him?”

All of the other Reindeer (and Santa, for that matter) looks at Blitzen with an expression of mild confusion. “Sorry,” says Blitzen. “I meant, ah, what should we do with him?” This is why Dasher is the leader. To carry this point a bit further, Dasher smacks Blitzen.

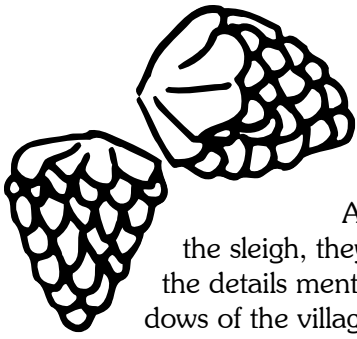
The PCs should become worried that every NPC suddenly seems to have firearms. If they ask why this is so, simply smile and say “It’s Christmas!”

The reindeer are – understandably – uncomfortable about the truce. Maybe the PCs, are, too. It’s not *crucial* that the PCs ally with Avarice. It’s just *cool* if they do. He gets a good death scene later on and he’ll be a big help with Angry Santa. If the PCs can’t help but kill him now, though, such is the way of things. Don’t *enforce* the truce; just let them see that it’s a good idea, at least for now. But even with Avarice dead, they can still find Loch Noël and deal with Angry Santa on their own. The text will assume the PCs are being cool and keeping peace with Avarice, but it’s easy to erase him from the picture if that’s not the case.

**Journey to Loch Noël**

The tiny village and lake known as Loch Noël appear only on the oldest maps of the Welsh countryside. It is a tiny place, hidden away just north of Pfwidian Thrythiormythl, the famous Welsh township wherein Lylidyth Lolyphronid felled the Methlalythfion tree with a clay mallet.

Fortunately, Santa Claus knows the way – this is another good reason to hold off on killing him. He can guide the sleigh expertly if the PCs let him, covering the 160 odd miles between London and Loch Noël in just under 40 minutes. The PCs will probably insist on keeping a gun at his head for the whole trip, but he’s a good-natured greedy scumbag and doesn’t



Miles to Go Before They Sleep

As the PCs disembark from the sleigh, they'll notice, in addition to the details mentioned above, that the windows of the village are all filled with fearful, staring faces. If the PCs enter the village, one of the men, Ffallwell, will come out of his house holding an ancient, rusted blunderbuss and ask the party their business in a thick accent.

Ffallwell has heard many strange sounds from the lake this evening, and he's really on edge. That, and the kids have been down with the flu, the wife's been kind of distant lately – he's having a bad week, and he's eager to take it out on the PCs. He owns the boat.

If the PCs are very, very nice to him and perhaps give him some sort of bribe (one of the Reindeers' automatic weapons would do), he'll tell them about the noises he's heard. He'll be willing to rent them the boat. He'll peer suspiciously at Avaricious Santa, as if he's seen him before.

THE MINT MONSTER

Description: This is a gigantic, hostile albino squid, covered in "peppermint" candy-stripes. It serves only as a gratuitous source of random violence, lurking in Loch Noël if the GM needs to pad out the session with more fights.

Cliché: Gratuitous Source of Random Violence (6), Gratuitous Source of Even More Random Violence if the Other Cliché Takes Lots of Damage (5), Gratuitous Source of Relatively Pathetic Resistance When All Else Fails (1).

NOTE: If you think that these Mock-Welsh words are a bit extreme, find a good map of Wales or a Welsh dictionary. Even a simple atlas will reveal such genuine humdingers as "Merthyr Tydfil," "Pwllhell" and "Aberystwyth." This is why Welshmen fail to notice the arcane chants used to summon and bind entities like Cthistmas and the Dark Spawn of Shub-Tannenbaum – it just sounds like ordinary Welsh.

The PCs can deal with Ffallwell and the village however they please. If it amuses, they can find hidden basements and cannibal cookbooks by searching the houses, or they can romp in the woods with more Spawn, or whatever. Improvise wacky villagers for as long as you can have fun with it. Eventually, the PCs will notice that bright, multicolored lights are reflecting on clouds and snow above the island. Something his happening out there.

It Came Upon a Midnight Clear

On the snow-covered island, the PCs can ditch the boat and move in towards the flashing lights and noises. When the PCs get close enough, read the Groovy Boxed Text:

You peer out across a brightly-lit clearing in the evergreens, illuminated in throbbing, changing colors by a *gigantic* circular ring of Christmas bulbs. Each bulb is larger than a man, and the circle of lights surrounds a massive stone altar, on which you see the form of kind, foolish Bob Cratchit, his wife, his two daughters and one of his sons. They're bound and gagged. The *final* Cratchit looms above them on crutches, slowly waving a holly wreath and shouting long chants of tongue-twisting Welsh gibberish into the falling snow. The gibberish is *doing* something. The ground trembles.

Gathered around the altar are more of the fleshy Christmas-tree beasts, and also many humans, dressed in simple robes painted to look like Santa suits. Many of them writhe on the ground, impressing their images into the snow in the form of "snow angels," which seems to be an important part of the ritual.

One man, a sinister, bloated, *jolly* man – stands over them, leading outer ring of cultists in a chant. Santa Claus. *Angry Santa Claus* – and, with one look at the glint of utter, destructive madness in his eyes, you can see that he earns that title.

Chapter Four: Away In A Manger

"One day, God said, this is what I will do. I'll send down my son, I'll send him to you, to clear up this humpity bumpity hullabaloo. His name will be Christ and he'll never wear shoes. And his pals will all call him the King of the Jews."

– *"The Dr. Seuss Bible"*
The Kids in the Hall

The first thing the PCs notice as they speed over the land of Judea is: it's snowing. On the other hand, it's been snowing continually since the adventure got underway. It was snowing at Antonio's when the reindeer arrived, it was snowing in New York, it was snowing in London, it was snowing in Wales, and it's snowing here. It's part of the sleigh's magic. But ... heavy snow draws a lot of attention when you bring it into (to pick a location at random) Roman-occupied Judea at the height of spring. Jerusalem gets snow every few years, but only in the wintertime and never this heavy. This will strike the entire city as bizarre.

Santa brings snow here every Christmas Eve, but Santa can manipulate the sleigh's magic to warp time and soften memories, so by the time he's done deliv-

FAMOUS PEOPLE SORT-OF-NAMED- AFTER-JESUS WHO DO NOT APPEAR IN THIS ADVENTURE

Emmanuel de Grouchy, who screwed up Waterloo

Emmanuel Lewis, former child star

Emmanuelle, as portrayed by Sylvia Kristel

Manuel Noriega, Panamanian drug dealer

Victor Emmanuel II, first King of Italy

Edward G. Robinson – a tough guy, see? Yeah.

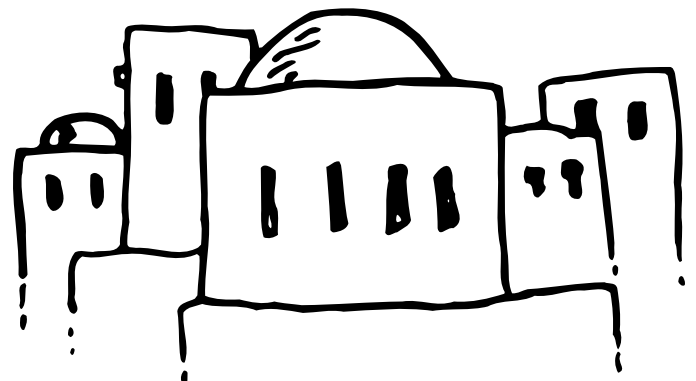
ering presents, the snow is melted and forming a cloud somewhere over Athens. The reindeer lack that much skill with Christmas Magic.

"Don't worry," says Dasher into his harness mike. "The snow will stop when we land – and look! There's Jerusalem!" The PCs can make out, amid valleys slowly filling with snow, a large walled town built on a rocky hill. It's evening, and the PCs can barely make out the torches and lamps of the city through the snow. They can amuse themselves thinking of the reaction in the streets at this time. They can almost hear the watchmen calling out to one another on Jerusalem's walls.

RISUS Makes Baby Jesus Cry

The PCs have only a few hard facts to work with here. They can guess that the pair of Santas working Jerusalem are the two remaining, non-Envious Santa Clauses – "Stuck Up" and "Lazy" Santa, the Santas epitomizing Pride and Sloth. According to the meter on the Magic Sleigh, they have arrived in the early spring, 6 B.C. – one night before Christ's birth.

Envy has been consistent. He wants to destroy anything Christmassy that isn't Clauseian. Jesus qualifies. So the PCs will probably realize that they have



GAMING IS EDUCATIONAL!

Risus doesn't usually bother mentioning specific prices for things because money's just this thing that happens and stuff. Except when the PCs don't have any, and odds are they don't have any Mock-Biblical currency to spend in Jerusalem.

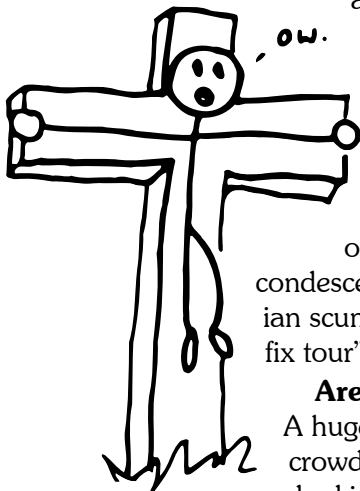
Heribab's fine with barter, and he may even be impressed enough by the look of futuristic coinage to accept some if he can be convinced it contains precious metal. The local currency is mostly in *shekels*, which are worth about a dollar, or *bekahs*, which are half-shekels. Also, since King Herod answers to Rome (no matter how much money he spends trying to make it look like he doesn't), there's a lot of Roman money around. The two most well-known units of Roman currency (that is, the two I've learned about from watching movies) are the *sestertius* (plural *sestertices*) and the *denarius* (plural *denarii*). There are four sestertices to the denarius, and one denarius is about \$5. If you want to do a *Life of Brian* joke and have the "talent for an old ex-leper" routine, remember that a talent is a mass of metal used for large mercantile exchanges. It's around 56, 75, or 90 pounds depending on where the merchant hails from and/or which historian you ask.

Yeah, I know. Just remember that a shekel is a dollar and skip the rest.

How the PCs go about getting any of this stuff is up to them. I'm sure they have their little ways.

Area 3 – Crucifixion Sites: If the PCs do some *real* nasty stuff, they'll be sent here. They start their long walk at the Praetorium Antonia, and end up on the old cross here to get some sense nailed into them.

For the morbid, there are bleachers and a snack bar.



Area 4 – Praetorium

Antonia: This is a big barracks and fortress where all of Herod's soldiers and the Roman officers live. They hang out here, being rude and condescending to any visiting civilian scum. This is where the "crucifix tour" begins.

Area 5 – Pool of Bethesda:

A huge public pool, this place is crowded all day with yelling kids dunking each other and peeing

in the water. Bored Roman centurion lifeguards watch over it and shout at the little brats to break the monotony. Several shops nearby sell swimwear, if the PCs want to take a dip, join a water polo league, or just work on some tan-lines.

Area 6 – Sheep Market: Sheep are great for wool, tasty chops, and a passable stew made with potatoes and lots of thyme. PCs may have other uses for them.

Area 7 – Adam's House of Ribs: The most popular hangout for Jerusalem's high-school and college-age kids. It's a fragrant and busy open-air food stall open late into the night, with a large dining patio filled with long benches, usually pretty crowded. There's also a huge coal-pit, a sales counter, and then a private kitchen building. A large, colorful cloth hangs on poles over the eating area, providing shade for customers. Big Adam and his crew run the place, and a large sign proclaims:

Bar-B-Q Feast!

Pork Ribs! Lamb Ribs! Camel Ribs!

You Want Ribs ?

Everyone Wants Ribs !

ADAM HAS RIBS !!!

* * * * *

#1 Rib Basket: 4 Shekels

#2 Big Man's Plate: 5 Shekels

#3 All-U-Can Eat Ribs: 7 Shekels

Roman Wine: 1 Shekel cup, 8 Shekel pitcher

All Rib Orders Come With
Choice of Fries or Slaw

The Ark of the Covenant contains some of the earliest writings on slaw. Not a lot of people realize that.

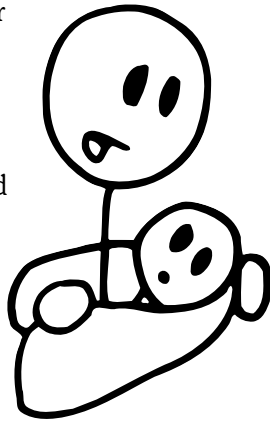
Chapter Five: Dash Away, Dash Away, Dash Away All!

*"I know thou worshippest Saint Nicholas as truly
as a man of falsehood may."*

– Henry IV, part I

 OUR HEROES HAVE ACHIEVED MUCH of their mission. Pervert and Gluttonous Santa died in New York City. Angry and Avaricious Santa met violent ends on Loch Noël in the Welsh countryside, and now both Lazy and Stuck-Up Santa have assumed room temperature in ancient Judea. If all has gone well, the corpses are piled in the back of Santa's own magic sleigh, in varying states of decomposition, with tongues lolling and eyes bugged out and beards in disarray.

The PCs may or may not have an artificial baby Jesus in their care. If they do, it requires changing.



"OKAY ... WHO FED JESUS CHILI?"

Every now and then, even baby Jesus needs his diaper changed (which is to say, the strips of linen used to swaddle him). Jesus is a very quiet, well-behaved baby, so the PCs will know mainly by the smell. Reswaddling baby Jesus is a Difficulty 15 task for most clichés that don't imply Bronze Age motherhood. If you have time, though, play the changing-and-reswaddling as a *combat* with the linen, which has Swaddling Clothes (4). If the PC loses ... well, if you've ever changed a baby, you know what happens when you lose.

It has been a long, difficult, and fiercely festive road. There is only one place left to go: to the North Pole, to the timeless kingdom of Christmas Joy ruled by a darkly twisted, and very Envious, Santa Claus. Begin reading the looming Groovy Boxed Text in a heavy, solemn tone. Then, let your tone wander wherever it needs to:

The reindeer are silent on the brief journey forward in time, and you are left with your thoughts in the comfortable benches of the sleigh, surrounded by the chaotic red-and-white swirl of the Christmas Magic tunnel through time. Then, there is a bright snap of light, the scent of pine, and a roar of cold air as you emerge at incredible speed into a stark, blue-grey sky.

Below you, the magical realm of Santa's North Pole fills the visible landscape; the horizons are obscured by the falling snow. Far from the barren ice-plains of the Earth's mundane arctic region, the land below is a varied region of mountains, pine forests, and peaceful frozen lakes. A network of nearby valleys is filled with candy cottages, gigantic gingerbread-built toy factories, and sugarplum barracks of all descriptions. Santa's complex is the size of a small city – and it's currently in flames. The smell of burnt cookies stings in your nostrils. Night is falling quickly – another sure sign that this is a magical land, and not the ordinary arctic.

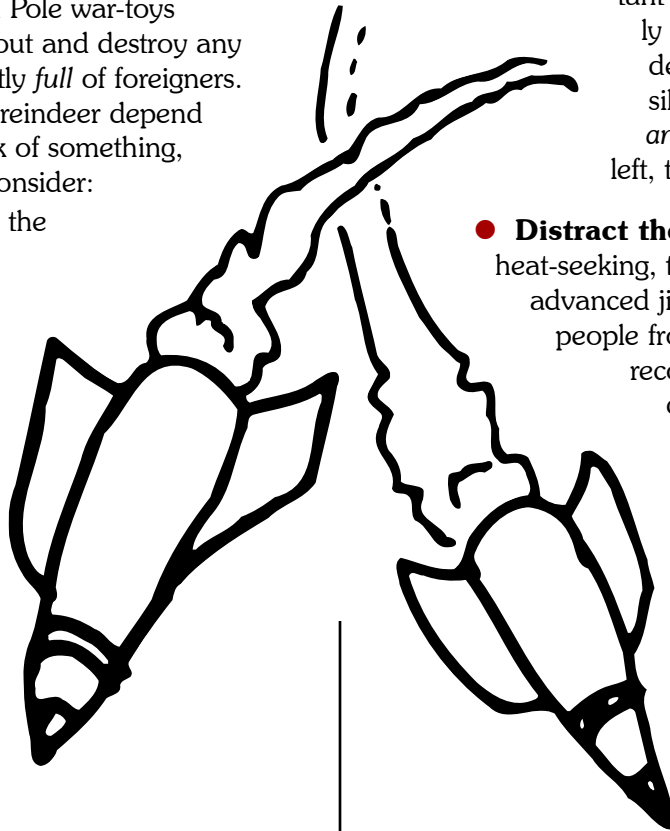
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(Continued)

Dasher, leading the sleigh through the swirling snow, shouts back “It wasn’t like this when we left – *look!*” and points a forward hoof toward the forest between the valleys, where a huge tower dominates a plateau, icy-white and forbidding. “That’s new,” Dasher says. The castle seems shrouded in darkness, with only a dim, fiery glow in its highest turrets. High walls, three moats, and two crackling Energy Shields surround it. The reindeer begin banking away, and start a gentle dive towards a spot in the snowy forest well clear of the tower ... but something must have picked up the sleigh’s arrival, because two missiles are streaking toward you from the complex below.

The twin missiles are of a new experimental model developed by the North Pole war-toys department, designed to seek out and destroy any foreigners. The sleigh is currently *full* of foreigners. Dasher is confused. The other reindeer depend on Dasher. The PCs must think of something, fast! Some tactics they might consider:

Bail Out, Neglecting to Tell the Reindeer: This is pretty heartless, but Player Characters can be very cruel. If they have parachutes or flying spells or gravity belts or something, they can land safely in a patch of forest, setting down softly in a deep drift of snow. If they *lack* some sort of safe-landing device, they hit hard permafrost, and walking away from that is a Difficulty 20 task for any cliché that implies being a tough, badass action-hero of some kind (Difficulty 25 or 30 for anything else). Failure won’t *kill* the PCs, but otherwise be ruthless. The missiles will destroy the sleigh and scatter Santa corpses and (very irate) reindeer around the forest.



● **Order Dasher to Take Evasive Action:** With a hard tug on the reins and a little yelling, the PCs can take full command of the sleigh. If someone has a piloting or space-dogfighting cliché (etcetera), let them roll against Difficulty 10 (Difficulty 20 otherwise). Success means a nimble power-dive through the forest, and the PCs hear the satisfying **BOOM!!!** of one of the missiles slamming into a tree. One missile’s left. Time for another tactic. Failure means a clumsy power-dive *into* the forest, and the PCs hear the less-satisfying **BOOM!!!** of both missiles joining them in a hard crash into the ground. What a mess. And baby Jesus needs changed again.

● **Shoot the Missiles:** The missiles aren’t here to jockey or trade blows, so it isn’t combat, just a Target Number roll. Difficulty is 15 for a genuine sharpshooter of some kind; it gets worse from there. Success, though, will send *one* of the missiles careening harmlessly into the forest for a distant explosion. Success with a really *whopping* implement of destruction will detonate the missile immediately, destroying it *and* its partner. If there’s a missile left, they’ll need to deal with it, still.

● **Distract the Missiles:** The missiles aren’t heat-seeking, they’re *foreigner-seeking*, using advanced jingotronic technology to kill people from out of town. Dasher will recognize them as such, and he’ll consider it something of a relief, since he’s a local. To distract the missiles requires no die-roll – just an out-of-towner being tossed free from the sleigh. If the PCs are mad at the party Halfling or something, they’re good to go; each foreigner tossed from the sleigh will distract and destroy one missile.

● **Hey ... Baby Jesus is a Foreigner:** You’re going straight to hell just for owning this module, you know.

Doesn't matter a wet slap. Whichever one they choose will be Warehouse Five. But we expert Game Masters must have our little fun, eh? Jolly good. Please suppress any urges to make sheeplike bleating noises at them. More Groovy Boxed Text awaits within the warehouse:

Occasional shafts of bright light flash in from the high, grimy windows, illuminating catwalks and cranes. You're surrounded by pallets loaded with crates and boxes of all sizes, bound with cord and covered with green tarpaulin. Outside, Frosties can be heard moving between the buildings, and hissing orders to one another in an icy, tinkling sing-song language that makes no sense to you.

One of the tarps moves ever so slightly. Then, it moves again, a little *less* slightly. Then, there's a rumbling noise, and if no PC has ripped the tarp aside by now, it falls, revealing a massive, fifty-ton battle tank, rumbling to life with red, glowing eyes.

Let the PCs respond in whatever manner they choose. This tank, although the PCs don't know it yet, is the highly experimental CJ990 Toy Tank – “The perfect gift for *your* little soldier this Christmas.” His name is Willie, and he's really glad to see the PCs. He's lonely.

If the PCs open fire on Willie, it's not likely to do much good, but Willie will be delighted. His eyes will glow brighter and he'll say “Boy! Neat! Nobody's shot at me since I was made! My name's Willie! What's your name?”

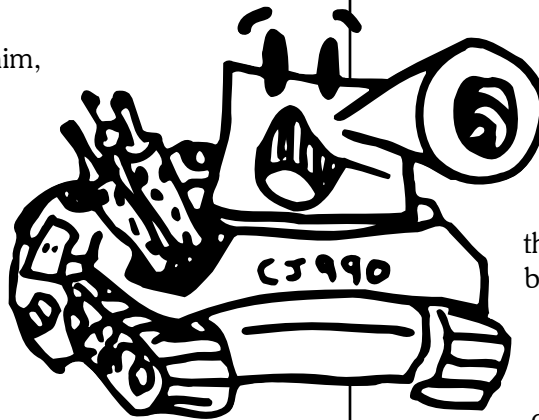
If the PCs don't shoot at him, he'll be just as friendly. From this point, the dialogue might go as follows:

PC: “Jeezus! It's @\$%* talking!”

Willie: “Yeah! It's great to see you guys!”

PC: “Yeah?”

Willie: “Uh-huh! I'm **this many** (extends three machine-gun barrels)! How many are you?”



WILLIE THE TOY TANK

Description: Willie is a naive, childlike giant toy robot tank. He's wearing a gigantic cammo-patterned diaper. This may cause fresh waves of horror if the PCs have done a lot of swaddling.

Clichés: Childlike Implement of Destruction (4)

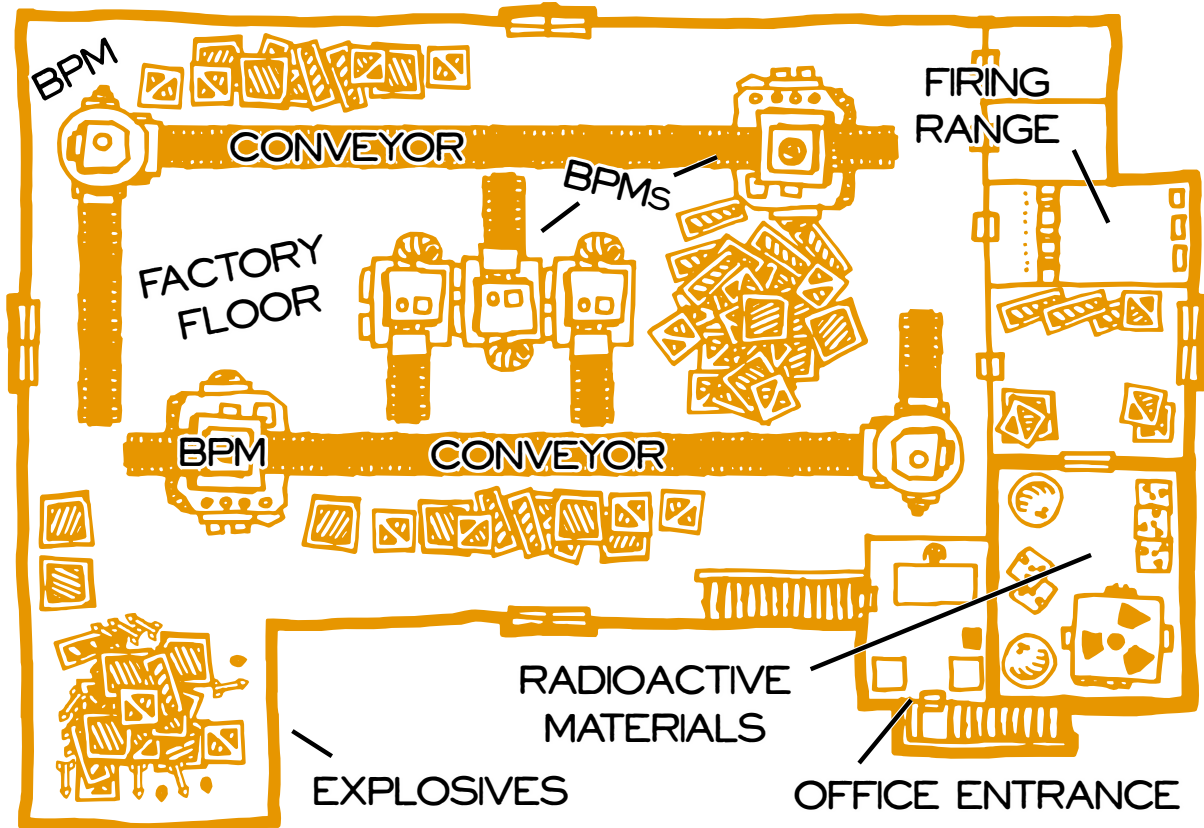
Willie is an unwanted toy. “None of the children wanted to pway wif me! They was scared by me!” is his version of the story, and it's essentially true. He's an R&D discard, mothballed here with an uncertain future.

If the PCs ask why he's wearing a diaper, or otherwise ask for more information, Willie will beam proudly. “I'm a mul-tie ... mul-tye ...” his lights tense and pulse in concentration, “multy-funk-shun-nal toy tank robot. I can blow up buildings, blow up other toy tanks, and I wet myself when you hug me!” Willie will look sad again. “Nobody wanted a toy tank that could wet himself.”

Sad but true, Willie's one of those children's toys that simulate biological functions (not to be confused with many adult toys, which also simulate biological functions). At the toy faire, he couldn't compete with the “Sergeant Blood Action Figure,” the “action figure that bleeds when you shoot him!” He'll pass this story along to the PCs if they seem interested.

Beyond that, Willie will immediately start asking the PCs lots of questions. Where are they from? Do they like pizza? Can Willie join the party and become an adventurer, too? Can he? Huh? Can he? And once he gets on that track, he won't get off it.

He'll show off his guns, his guidance system, and he'll even wet himself for them to convince the PCs that he *belongs* on their mission. The PCs may choose to be kind and play along, but Willie is gigantic and noisy and won't fit in the secret passageway, so while he can become an honorary party-member, he can't usefully accompany them beyond that point. He *can*, however, let them violently assault the target factory instead of doing the ninja routine, so he gives the PCs a broader range of tactical approaches, which almost makes up for that cruel inside joke we've shared about the different-colored warehouses.



War Toy Factory "X"

The map of the valley is clear enough – the secret passage is somewhere in the factory marked with an X. The PCs can get a clear view of both factories from the warehouse, by climbing on some crates (or Willie) and looking out through the high windows. This section describes the factory.

There are several ways to approach the goal. Some PCs will choose the roaring big-time violence approach of just storming it with Willie's help. Others will prefer to ninja around a bit. Still others, fully embracing what they can achieve with *Risus*, will leap into the middle of the warehouse with a microphone and engage everyone there in a pulse-pounding showtune-singing contest or – if you're a *very* lucky Game Master – a titanic struggle of musical spoon playing.

Outside the Factory: None of the entrances are locked, but each has a pair of Frosty guards. There are occasional Frosty patrols on the grounds, but they have predictable timing, so they can be dodged with fairly trivial Target Number rolls unless the party is outrageously noisy.

Factory Floor: This is filled with busily working, miserable Elves. With the exception of two evil turn-coat Elves who are now managing the factory (see below), they're all basically good little guys, scared stiff and forced into servitude. Frosties oversee the work. Freshly-painted stencils of Santa's profile (in a harsh angular style) cover the walls and floors.

Big, Pointless Machinery (BPMs): These are gigantic, chugging, noisy metallic boxes that, when turned on, spit out steady streams of dangerous toy robots, toy guns, toy grenades, toy ballistic missile systems, and so on. They can destroy toys just as easily; see *Conveyor Belts*, below.

A Huge Pile of Explosives and Ammunition: A pyramid of crates 15 feet tall. Each is labeled DANGER – HIGH EXPLOSIVES. It's a mix of bullets, missiles, land mines, grenades, plastique and dynamite, in sufficient quantity to destroy the entire factory, should anyone care to.

Conveyor Belts: These carry toys out from the Big Pointless Machinery. They also carry toys *into* Big Pointless Machinery where they can be chopped to bits by an array of half-ton manganese-steel grinding blades. The BPMs giveth; the BPMs taketh away. The

Santa's Sanctum

This is both a laboratory and a library. The only way in, or out, is via the secret door in Energy Shield Control. It's cluttered, but neatly contained in some Groovy Boxed Text:

This room contains the ruined contents of an occult laboratory – the original cottage where Santa's experiments went awry. All the surviving wreckage is here, scarred and charred ... books, beakers, alembics, half-melted ancient talismans that could be mistaken, at a glance, for broken tree-ornaments. Augmenting these are freshly-constructed bookshelves extending to the ceiling, sagging under the weight of ancient books. You all feel a tingle of dread, since these books seem very reminiscent of the mad tome you saw in Tiny Tim's nightmare version of the Cratchit house.

You also notice that Envious Santa Claus is here, looking up from the book he's reading and peering at you curiously over the rims of his spectacles. His eyes twinkle as he offers a welcoming "ho, ho, ho" in a soft but comforting tone. "And what do you want for Christmas?"



Well, this could go all kinds of ways. If they've spoken to both Lumpkin and Mandy, they'll have a good idea that Santa Claus isn't *really* the boss of what's going on (that would be Rudolph) and that Santa Claus has cracks and seams in his evil-villain exterior, revealing the jolly old softy somewhere inside.

On the other hand, a rocket launcher to the face is so much simpler than negotiating, which explains much of world history (even the parts prior to rocket launchers).

Santa is on the defensive, but he's also very confident, because here in his fortress his Christmas Magic is quite strong, and because the sanctum has a fire-

place, he can use his escape trick if things go poorly. It will be very difficult (though certainly not plot-immunity impossible) to kill Santa Claus here and now, and he knows that.

If the PCs have Mandy *with* them, she's a two-bonus-dice *weapon* in any emotional battle with Santa. If the PCs have Lumpkin with them, though, he's a two-bonus-dice *weapon on Santa's side* of any emotional or intellectual fight ... while this is the core spirit of Santa, he's also an icon of Envy, and Santa Claus isn't so stupid that he doesn't know that his wife

has spent a lot of quality time with Lumpkin, and much of it while wearing nothing but butter-scotch ice-cream topping. This is the part of Santa that really *really really* isn't cool with that. The part of Santa that likes it, videotapes it, and wrote to *Penthouse Forum* about it is a part of Santa the PCs have already killed, back in New York.

And speaking of Envy, that's *probably* the strongest card to play in any conversation about Rudolph. Santa's driven by his envy of the rest of Christmas, but he's also envious that Rudolph, and not he, is the ancient demon running the show. That's because Envy is one of the Seven Deadly Sons of Father Sin, and Envy has envied Father's power for uncounted millennia, now.

If the PCs make a new "friend," Santa knows *everything* about what's been going on, and will spill in whatever detail is necessary (including the entire story of Rudolph Rein·Deer). If the PCs beat Santa up he'll do his best to escape via the hearth. If he can't manage it and the PCs make a new corpse, they still have Rudolph to deal with. Whatever goes on, goes on.

This room contains some valuable occult notes that the PCs will find if they poke around when Santa isn't here (see Player Handouts). He may or may not offer to share them if they strike a truce.

Rein·Deer Games

The castle's Main Hall is a Christmas feasthall to end all feasthalls; it also serves as a command & control center for Santa's one-man war (seven-man war?) on the truth of Christmas.

One man and a reindeer, that is.

MANDATORY LOYALTY QUIZ

.....
This form required for all Elves of Class
8c.II through 12d.IV inclusive, and for
any Elves employed in the security or
toy testing departments regardless of
pay grade or rank.

Ask your superior if you are unsure.
Report any nagging feelings of dissent
immediately. We can help.
.....

North Pole Printing Office
Level 14
Jolly Obsidian Fortress of Obedient Cheer
North Pole

Not For Distribution to the Mundane World
349343.34345.33-ABJGD-3.4 Tinkleberry, Printsmaster General

REMEMBER:

Jolly
=
Moral
=
Obedient

Do you have what it takes to be part of the New Christmas Order? Take this simple loyalty test and hand it to your superior officer. Please use a #2 pencil only and fill circles completely. Choose only one response per question. Failure to comply may be interpreted as evidence of dissent. Finish the following sentences:

Christmas ...

- ☐ Is a time of family and giving and feasting.
- ☐ Is a time to celebrate Christ's birth and watch *Peanuts* on T.V.
- ☒ Is the global day of Santa Claus worship.

Santa Claus ...

- ☐ Is comin' to town. *VS we about this one - ask thingz.*
- ☐ Should respect his place as one facet of a great holiday.
- ☐ Has a very attractive ass.

Dead Baby Jokes Are ...

- ☐ In very poor taste.
- ☐ Kind of old by now.
- ☒ Funny if it's Jesus.

The Secret Chamber Behind the Energy Shield Control Room is

- ☐ Where I once had sex with Mrs. Claus
- ☐ Where I frequently have sex alone *Only ONE ???*
- ☐ Off Limits

For bonus loyalty affirmation and possible promotion, check *only* one from each pair:

- | | | | |
|--|---|---------------------------------|--|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Stuffing | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Cranberry Sauce | <input type="checkbox"/> Turkey | <input type="checkbox"/> Douglas Fir |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mashed Potatoes | <input type="checkbox"/> Gravy | <input type="checkbox"/> Ham | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Colorado Blue Spruce |
| <i>Toofurkey.</i> | | | |