

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,
Production & Illustration*

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

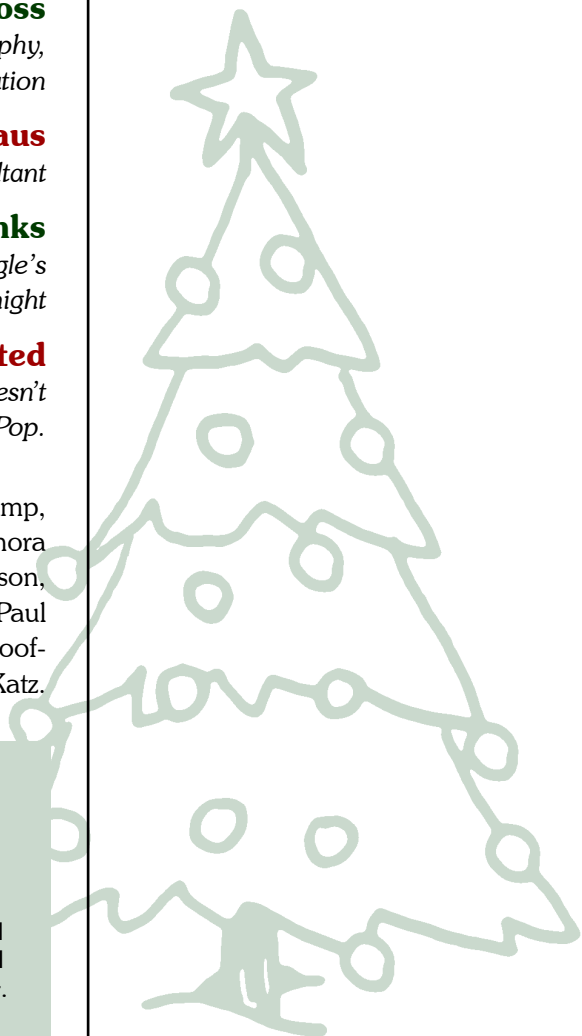
Dedicated

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

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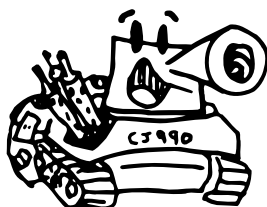
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Allergen Alert: the *Kringle in Time* playtest process involved snack foods that may have included peanuts, wheat, soy and dairy products. Cease play immediately if symptoms manifest.



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A Christmas Story

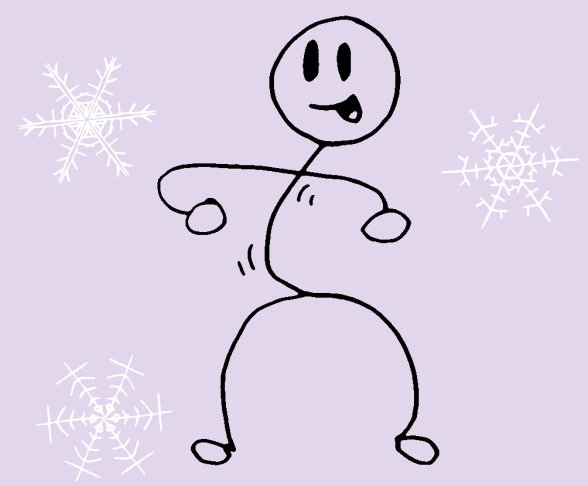
IT WAS ABOUT TWELVE YEARS ago, and it was the first Christmas after I'd begun work on *A Kringle in Time*. I was single in those days, which isn't nearly as good as being married but had its charms. That year, the charms included a wild little thing named (or, perhaps, not named) Melina. A mutual friend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

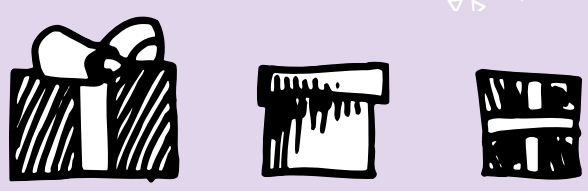
There is a cliché on television that says that department store Santas often fail to show up for work, leaving the harried staff to hunt for an emergency replacement Santa to talk to the kiddies and hand out candy and pose for Polaroids. That Christmas, that magical Christmas, that cliché visited our 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.



www.cumberlandgames.com

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.

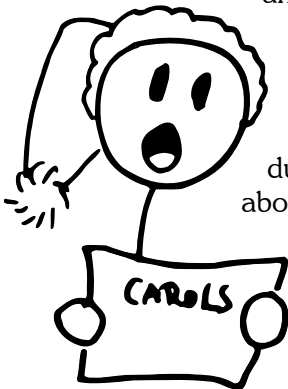
But there was a Christmas (not too long ago) when something extraordinary happened. When a handful of people came face to face with the magic of Christmas. They knew that this was the *true* magic of Christmas, so they killed it. This is their tale.

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.

This is an adventure about cannibalism *and* about rotting corpses, but probably not at the same time.

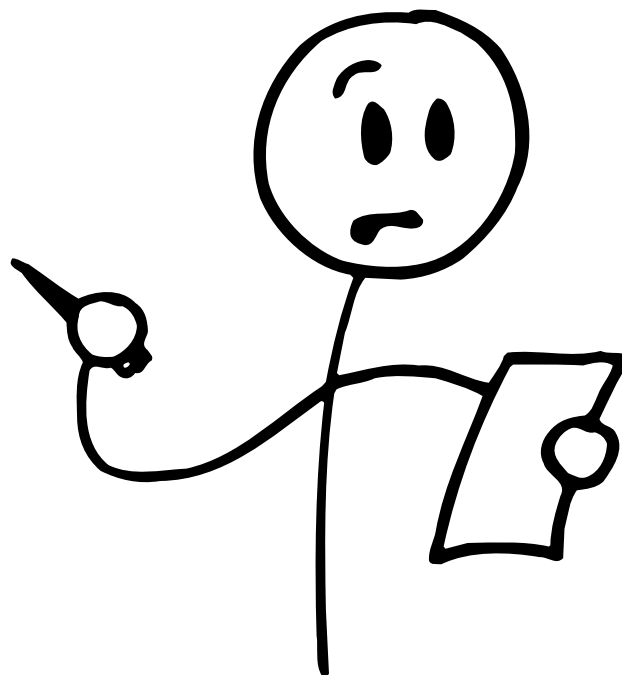
What all this means is: this **Risus** adventure has been carefully crafted to fit seamlessly into your existing **Risus: The Anything RPG** campaign, even if it's very serious. Especially if it's very serious. If you're running an especially serious **Risus** campaign, you *need* this adventure more than you probably know. Wherever the PCs are, whomever the PCs are, *whatever* the PCs are, Santa's magic reindeer will seek them out, having decided that *they* and *they alone* are the perfect band of adventurers to save Christmas. And then it's the proverbial romp through space and time. You know the proverbs of which I speak, I'm sure.

To keep the text uncluttered, I'll be writing the adventure to begin (and, if things go well, conclude) at an ordinary bar & grill called *Antonio's*, tucked into an ordinary city on **Risus Earth** (see page 5).

If you're using this adventure with an established campaign, just move *those* parts of the adventure to the group's ordinary haunt. If they hang out, instead, at a fantasy tavern with lusty bar-wenches, start it there. If they hang out at a seedy spaceport terminal, start it there instead. If the PCs are all senior citizens stuck in an assisted-living community, start it in the cafeteria or the day room. If the PCs are a group of costumed superheroes, start it in the executive snack lounge of their superteam headquarters. If the PCs are a group of costumed superheroes who can't *afford* an executive snack lounge, maybe it's high time they considered switching sides and becoming supervillains. If the PCs seem to live in a world without Christmas ... well, that's about to change, at least as far as *they're* concerned.

NPC STATS

The stats for important NPCs appear in sidebars throughout the adventure, but lots of NPCs don't get specific stats (those that aren't likely to stray beyond a single scene or that aren't worth their own spiffy snowflake background). When that's the case, they have the cliché "Just Some Regular Schmuck" at either (2) or (3), depending on how impressive a schmuck you feel that they should be. Particularly well-rounded schmucks also have a *second* cliché, "Schmuck With a Hobby" at either (1) or (2).



If you're running this adventure as a standalone campaign, you can start it anywhere you feel like, to suggest whatever kind of Player Characters you'd enjoy seeing your *players* enjoy. If you think this adventure would be fun for a party of Caribbean pirates, tell the players they're starting in a bar in Tortuga in the 17th century. If you think a group of Mafia wiseguys would be better at saving Christmas, start the adventure in a strip club or a small Italian restaurant. Adventuring ninja? Ninja bar. Flinds? Flindly bar. A menagerie of wizard's familiars? Again, a strip club or a small Italian restaurant.

Or: just stick with what's here, tell the players to make whatever they want, and see what they come up with. Adapting the prologue will be pretty easy either way.

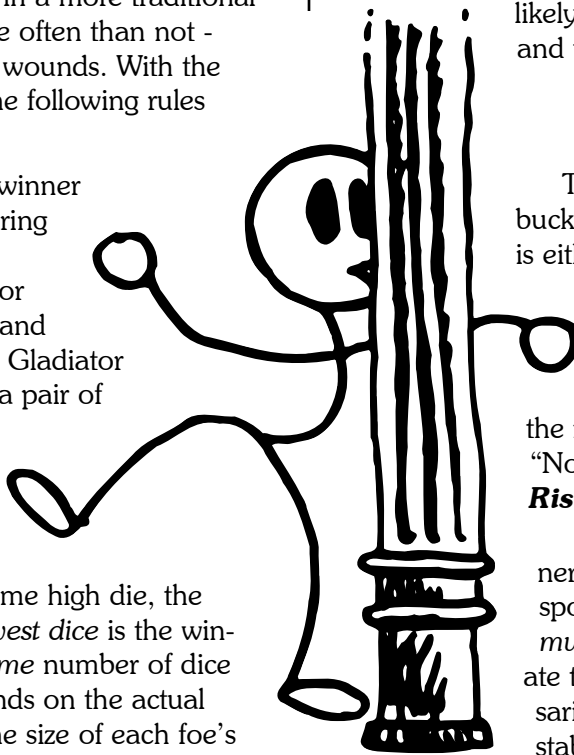
Standard (10-dice) **Risus** characters (with or without a little prior campaign experience under their belts) are best. Use any **Risus** optional rules and variants (your own or from the exceedingly groovy **Risus Companion**) your group enjoys; the adventure requires no variants but welcomes all of them with open arms. Since this adventure includes a fair amount of old-fashioned deadly mayhem, the **Deadly Combat** option, in particular, might be a good choice (so much so that I've included it on the next page for those without access to the **Companion**).

Deadly Combat

Risus assumes that combat isn't automatically - or even *ordinarily* - deadly. A lot of **Risus** combats don't even involve physical forces; they're psychological, social, abstract, even artistic. But the same assumption carries over to *physical* fight scenes: If two men duel with swords, the winner can "win" by disarming his opponent and dropping his trousers to embarrass him. In a gunfight, the defeated party may be out of ammo and caught reloading, with a pistol barrel shoved against his temple. In a dogfight between World War I flying aces, the Red Baron can line Snoopy up for the kill but then - sportingly - spare his life because this is the *Christmas* version of the song. Use this option for campaigns where none of the above is really true, for games where the **Risus** approach to combat is presented in a more traditional mode, and where a fight is - more often than not - settled by serious or even deadly wounds. With the Deadly Combat option in play, the following rules changes apply:

- **Best of Set:** Determine the winner of a combat round by comparing the *single highest die* rolled instead of the total. If Gladiator Rex rolls 4 dice for a 2, 1, 3, and 6, he'll win the round against Gladiator Joe who rolled a 3, a 4, and a pair of 5's. Joe rolled the higher total, but Rex had the single highest die.
- **The Goliath Rule:** If the combatants each score the same high die, the combatant who rolled the *fewest dice* is the winner. Only if they rolled the *same* number of dice is a tie really a tie. This depends on the actual number of dice rolled - not the size of each foe's cliché when perfectly healthy.
- **Smells Like Team Spirit:** When PCs attack as a team, everybody's dice count for determining the single highest die (not just sixes) - but *only* the leader's dice are counted for the Goliath Rule.

There are no alterations beyond the three listed (the winner still determines the fate of the loser, for example, so combat isn't *required* to be deadly).



When combining this option with Boxcars & Breakthroughs (see the **Risus Companion**), breakthrough rolls don't apply to combat.

Be warned that this rule *dramatically* softens the difference between cliché levels, so far as combat is concerned, diluting some of the "may the best man win" nature usually central to the game. Without it, a Grim Vigilante (5) is basically certain of defeating any foe with a single cliché rated at (3) or lower - and seldom breaks a sweat beating down one rated at (4). With this option in play, he still has an edge, but he has to really fight to win. This option isn't necessary for comedic **Risus** games (where losing is just as fun as winning, and where death is rare or desirably funny) but it works fine for them, too. It's ideal for those "serious adventure **Risus**" moods that strike now and then without warning, creating a more sporting playing field when the loser is more likely to be killed than left counting stars and tweety-birds.

Swing Combat

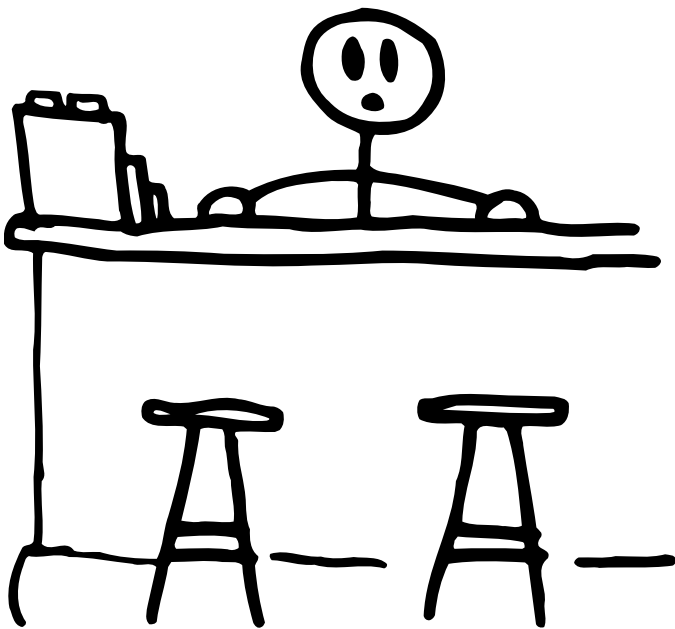
This is a good way to handle "swash-buckling" cinematic play. Every combat is either Deadly or Not Deadly, from the beginning. The aggressor normally determines which. When in doubt, the Game Master decides. "Deadly" combats use the rules for the Deadly Combat option. "Not Deadly" combats use the regular **Risus** rules.

Once committed to battle, the winner is more limited in his "choice of spoils." In a deadly combat, the losers *must* be injured to a degree appropriate to the weapons involved - not necessarily *killed*, but definitely shot, stabbed, beaten, burned, lased, phased, disrupted, spaced, blown up, broken, run over, frozen, hacked, julienned, punctured, lacerated, etc. as appropriate for the armaments applied to their person. By contrast, the winner of a "Not Deadly" combat *must* be sporting. He can't kill his foes or seriously hurt them (a few bruises or inconsequential flesh wounds are fine), but must defeat them in some other, more inventive and amusing, fashion.

Chapter One: There Arose Such A Clatter

ANTONIO'S BAR & GRILL IS a dull affair to look at, but the pizza is good and the beer is cheap. It's tucked away down an unremarkable alley in the unglamorous rainy streets of the cheaper part of town. We don't remember which town – it isn't very important, anyway. It's last year – or maybe the year before that – and it's Christmas Eve. Antonio is holding a party. Outside, the rain is turning to sleet.

The clientele at Antonio's isn't swank – a mix of construction workers, bored middle-aged businessmen, hoodlums, gangsters, soldiers of fortune, and other rough company. Contract laborers mingle with contract killers and share clouds of beer breath, cheering at the touchdowns and whistling at the girls in the rock videos. It's the kind of bar where people do that



Antonio as he'd like to be remembered if the PCs do something violent that results in his death. At the moment, he's considering that possibility.

bet about stabbing between your fingers. Since everybody wants cheap beer, good pizza, the occasional fried eggplant sub and a place to feel at home, everybody gets along, most of the time.

They get along *especially* well when Antonio decides to throw a Christmas party, and every 365 days or so, Maria (that's Antonio's assistant barkeep) pulls out a huge dusty box and decks Antonio's halls for all they're worth. Garland is hung over the stuffed jackalope heads that adorn the walls, fake snow is sprayed on the windowsills, the windows, on the tables, the floors, the bartop, and often Antonio's armpits. The ceiling is dotted with mistletoe, and the stage (Antonio gets live bands in on weekends) becomes overflowing with a gigantic scotch pine, itself overflowing with lights, ornaments, and tinsel.

Tacky, some say. But not to Maria's face. She's sweet provided she isn't angered.

This very night is the climax of it all: the Christmas Eve Bash. Our Heroes have already arrived, settled into some good times and hard drinks. The hour is getting late, and Maria's dipping into Antonio's custom eggnog, which is even now overflowing in the punchbowls. She's weaving through the

ANTONIO

Description: The owner and usual barkeep at Antonio's Bar and Grill. He's an affable guy, pretty young for a business owner, and pretty unlikely to engage in any combat that doesn't involve drinking contests, pitching pennies, or spitting distances. He loves to have a good time and enjoys pretty much anything that doesn't require math. He's a guitarist when nobody's around, which is to say that when he hauls out his guitar, people suddenly remember how late it is.

Clichés: Fun-Loving Bartender (3), Businessman (1), Master Chef (1), Romeo (1), Wannabe Rock Star (1), Pervy Tree-Fancier (1)

MARIA

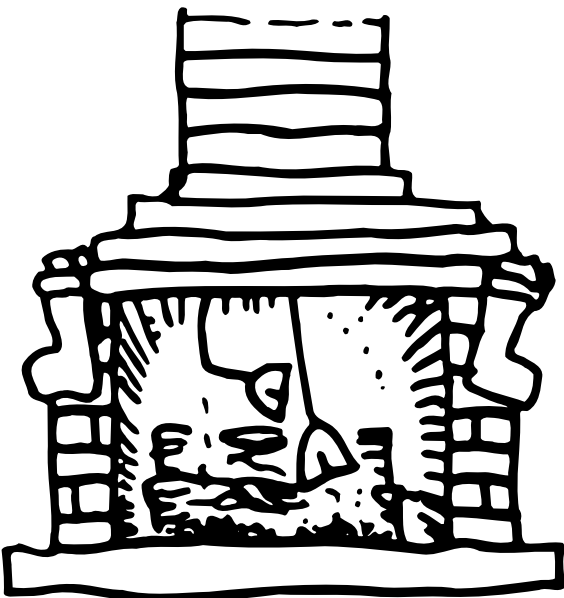
Description: Antonio's chief assistant barkeep, Maria's tough, smart, witty and capable. She flirts playfully, but she has no patience for artless lechers with wandering paws and no useful dialogue. The bar is an excuse for Antonio to pretend he's 22 years old forever, but thanks to Maria it's also a successful, stable business.

Clichés: Fun-Loving Bartender (3), The One Around Here Who Can Actually Do Stuff (3), Every Drunkard's Bashful Crush (3)

crowd in a manner which can only be described as "bebopping," passing out red hats to the customers, flirting with the cute ones, pushing the older and drunker ones away.

A Sudden Noise

After a while, the party will die down, and the evening turns mellow, with sodden carols sung by sodden carolers. The gigantic pizza in the shape of a holly wreath is all but gone, with Maria picking listlessly at a stray pepperoni while she listens politely to a customer sobbing into his beer about how irritating his mistresses are. In the corner, a beagle is stoned hard on root beer, and apparently believes he's in France in World War I. The regulars can't decide if they're singing *Hark, The Herald Angels Sing* or *Joy*



to the World, but seem to have managed a compromise. Soon, Antonio will start doing his embarrassing trick with the Christmas tree, at which point people will start making excuses to go home.

After you've set a scene of quiet pathos, shout "**Suddenly...!**" in a deep and ominous voice. Then read the following Groovy Boxed Text aloud:

There is a loud **THUMP**.

There is another loud **THUMP**.

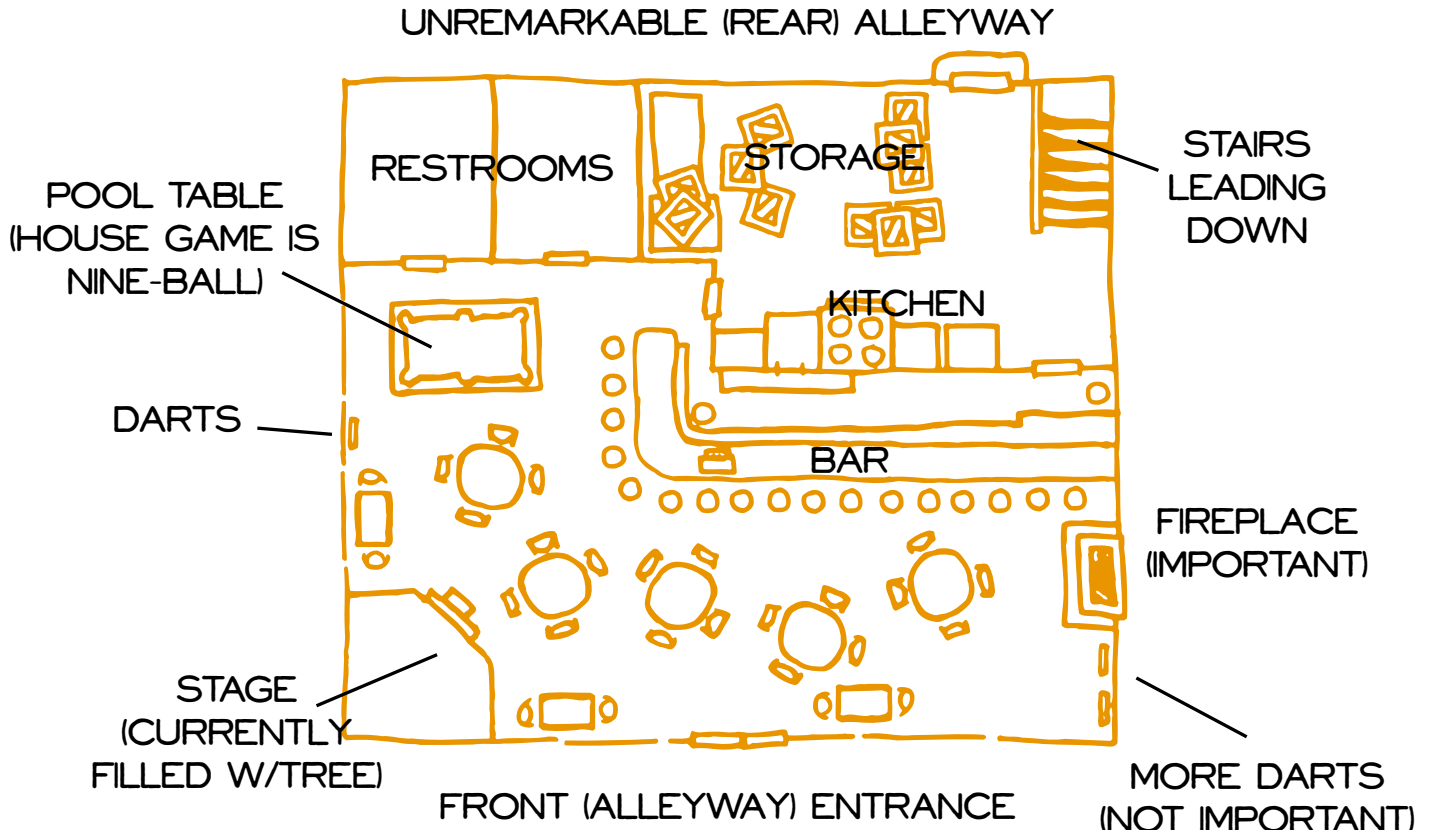
The bar falls silent, and several of the local thugs draw weapons. The clicks of safeties being disengaged form a collective and menacing crackle. A regular pattern of clicking and a series of **THUMPS!** can be heard from above, on the roof. A scratching noise emanates from the huge brick fireplace. Small fragments of soot fall into the fire, which immediately extinguishes itself with a magical sparkle. Every gun in Antonio's clusters together, aimed at the hearth.

Check to see if the PCs are doing anything interesting at this point. If they run outside to check the roof, they can make out very little; the sleet has turned unexpectedly to heavy snowfall. If they draw their own weapons, that's cool (even Antonio is going for the shotgun he keeps under the till).

A dusty, sooty shape lowers itself clumsily into the hearth – but it's no human shape, no jolly red-suited shape. Its legs end in cloven hooves, and its massive body is covered with pale, shaggy fur. The beast stands erect on two hind legs, and stares at you with gigantic, glassy eyes. Its head bears enormous antlers.

"Merry Christmas," it says.

This is Dasher, the captain of the Claus Elite Reindeer Team. He'll say as much, while seven other deer plop into the hearth and enter the room, standing behind their leader.



EXPANDING THE SCENE

Play up the Christmas-party atmosphere, and let the PCs do anything they feel like. Explore the comedic possibilities of mistletoe, the fireplace (lit for the occasion), and stockings hung by the chimney with care (or, at least, with tacks). Go around the table at least once to see how everyone spends time at the party. If you want to warm them up with a little character-establishing action before the *real* adventure kicks in, try one of these on for size:

Get Your Paws Off: A surly local gets a little too drunk and starts pawing at Maria every time she passes. Maria's a pro at this sort of thing; she politely ignores him when possible, firmly but sweetly slaps his hand away otherwise. It doesn't ruffle her feathers; it's old news. If any of the PCs are awash in chivalric testosterone, though, they might step in to make it more trouble than it's worth, sparking off a festive holiday brawl. Better still, any Romeos in the party might decide to look much more appealing compared to the drunkard, and engage him in a more genteel combat of comparative flirtation. The Drunk has the effective clichés Surly Drunk (3) and Charming Man-About-Town (1). If backed into a corner, he's also a NASCAR Aficionado (2).

Caroling, Caroling: A group of Christmas carolers drops in to kick the snow from their boots and warm up with drinks. They greet the bar with a song – but the PCs know that any singing in this bar is, by tradition, an invitation to a singing contest. Remind the players of this solemn tradition. The entire bar will stand behind them, providing (useless, in game terms) backup for the musical combat that ensues. The carolers are a Grunt-Squad with Tireless Bringers of Good Cheer (5). If they defeat the PCs, they'll reduce them all to tears with their gentle carol about the sympathies of *Good King Wenceslas*, and then slam them to the floor with the nostalgia of *White Christmas*.

The Thing in the Basement: Antonio crooks a finger at one or all of the PCs; he wants to speak privately. When he's sure that nobody's looking, he'll glance back at the storeroom. "I been hearin' things downstairs today. Been afraid to go down there ... You've always seemed like the sort who wouldn't be bothered by a little trouble. Check it out for me, and I'll do a round of drinks on the house. What do you say?" Maybe it's just rats. Maybe it's a teenage couple making out. Maybe it's a stray dog that squirmed in through the basement window to get out of the cold (now eager to follow a group of PCs around). Maybe it's 25 levels of dungeon-delving bliss with a beer motif ... because there's no bar anywhere that doesn't secretly have a dungeon adventure waiting right beneath it.

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.

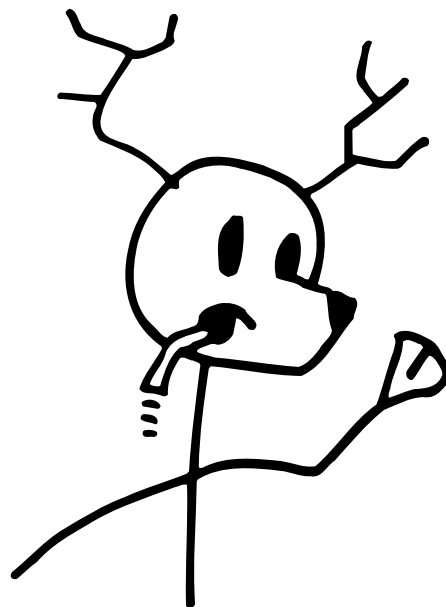
Male reindeer can weigh upwards of 700 pounds.

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.

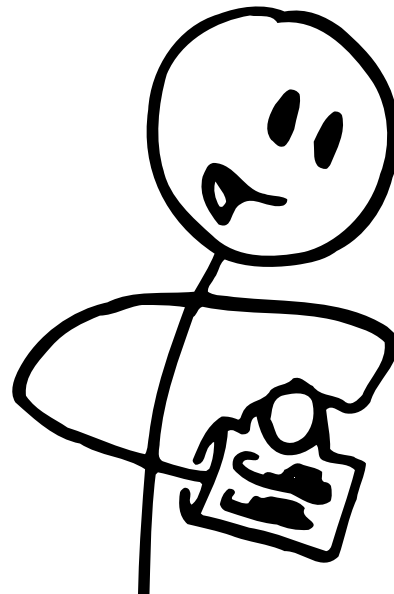
If Every Day Were Just Like Christmas

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.*

MISSION DETAILS

Dasher knows all the important details of the task set before the PCs, but he won't spill it all at once in bland exposition unless the PCs request it. He'll focus on the most important and immediate matter – that two of the meddling Santas are working wickedness in New York City. He'll push for an immediate trip to the Big Apple to hunt them down, and reveal the rest as questions (or questionable tactics) arise:

Why Not Just Go to the North Pole and Kill the Leader?

Santa's power is spread among multiple points in space-time. If the PCs simply kill Envy, the others could go into hiding and ruin Christmas for years. Furthermore, the core *spirit* of Santa – the essence of his charismatic leadership – seems invested in Envy right now, but might be able to treat any of the errant Santas as "escape Clauses," diverting his wicked will where the PCs could never find him. So, the subordinate Clauses must be eliminated first, before the battle can be taken to the North Pole.

What Do We Do With All the Santa Claus Corpses?

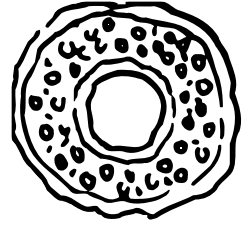
Keep them safe; pile them up in the rear of the sleigh. Mrs. Claus and the Elf Rebellion have been gathering ancient tomes on Christmas Magic to study, and she believes that if she has *all* the Santa Corpses intact, she can perform a ritual to reconstruct the original, jolly, goodhearted Santa Claus she's married to. If there are any corpses missing from the ritual, the results "wouldn't be pretty." That's the term Mrs. Claus used when describing the problem to Dasher. He doesn't know any more beyond it "wouldn't be pretty."

Which Santa is Where and When?

Preliminary intelligence is sketchy. The Rebellion believes that one of the two Santa Clauses working in New York City is "Pervert" Santa. Mrs. Claus thinks that the Santas have been dispatched in "buddy" pairs to provide balance for their extreme personalities.

Everyone feared the worst, but Santa emerged from the wreckage – several times! There was a group of *seven* Santas, each calling himself by a new name. There was the leader, Envious, and his cohorts,

Gluttonous, Perverted, Greedy, Angry, Lazy, and Stuck-Up! They immediately began to change things, and spoke of a Master Plan to take over the world for themselves! Envious Santa wanted Christmas to be all *his*, the *Santa Claus holiday*. The others seemed to like the idea.



Setting immediately to work, the new Santas transformed the North Pole into an icy prison camp, devoid of cheerful music and blinking lights.

Drawing on the Dark Side of Christmas Magic (it, too, is like duct tape), they constructed a vast fortress, and the Elves were put to work in its dungeons. Mrs. Claus, the Reindeer team, and several Elves have managed to escape in the last month or so, to form a rebellion. Meanwhile, the Deadly Santas are already scattered across the space-time continuum, performing devilry and altering the nature of reality.

Mrs. Claus herself has sent the reindeer to seek heroes to perform a terrible but essential deed: Santa Claus must die to save Christmas. Will the PCs help?

Of Course They Will

The reindeer, frankly, are assuming that the heroes are willing to Save Christmas for no pay, but they've also come prepared with offers of cash and swag, just in case. If the PCs start talking fees, the reindeer will first try tears and sniffing about all the poor little kids who will have to go without presents from now on, and so on. If the PCs push the issue, the reindeer are prepared to offer up to \$10,000 per man and all the candy-canes they can eat. Dasher will also wink and promise successful heroes "a little extra something in the sack," by which he means the sack of Christmas gifts forthcoming for the holiday. If the PCs misunderstand him, though, he's not entirely close-minded.

The sleigh is all warmed up. Time to go!

Why Not Just Go to the North Pole and Kill the Leader (Optional Single-Evening Game Version)?

Yeah, okay.

Chapter Two: Debacle on 34th Street

“Why all of the sudden is the sketch dirty?”

“Child molestation is a tricky subject
with the affiliates.”

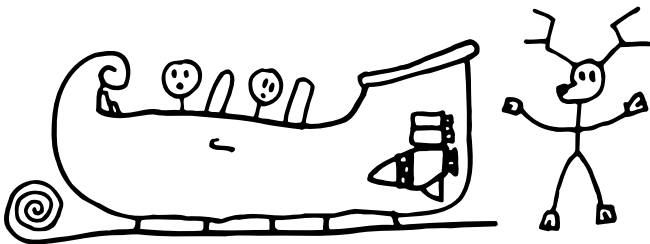
“Read the papers! Half the country’s doing it!”

“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.

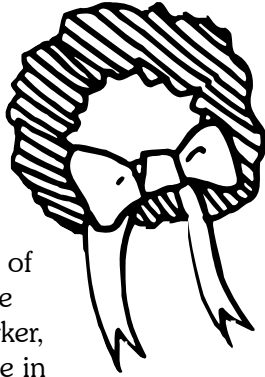
GAMING IS EDUCATIONAL!

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.

- **Central Park:** A big rectangular park with restaurants and people sailing remote-controlled boats regardless of the weather. This part of the city is nicely decked-out for the holidays. Nice apartment buildings line it on the sides. Joggers and muggers are each common fauna.
- **Greenwich Village:** One of the artsy capitols of the world, “the Village” is a gold mine of human comedy at it’s best – don’t waste it! It’s on the southern end of Manhattan, centered around Washington Square, which has a big goofy arch thing in it. This place is full of coffee shops, theatres, jazz clubs, and other haunts of the black-sweater/film school set. Any PCs trying to start their own religion or political movement might find supporters here, hanging out at the health food stores. Good bookstores, though. Soho is just southish of it.
- **Statue of Liberty:** The traditional “first sight” of immigrants to America, it’s big, copper, and hollow.

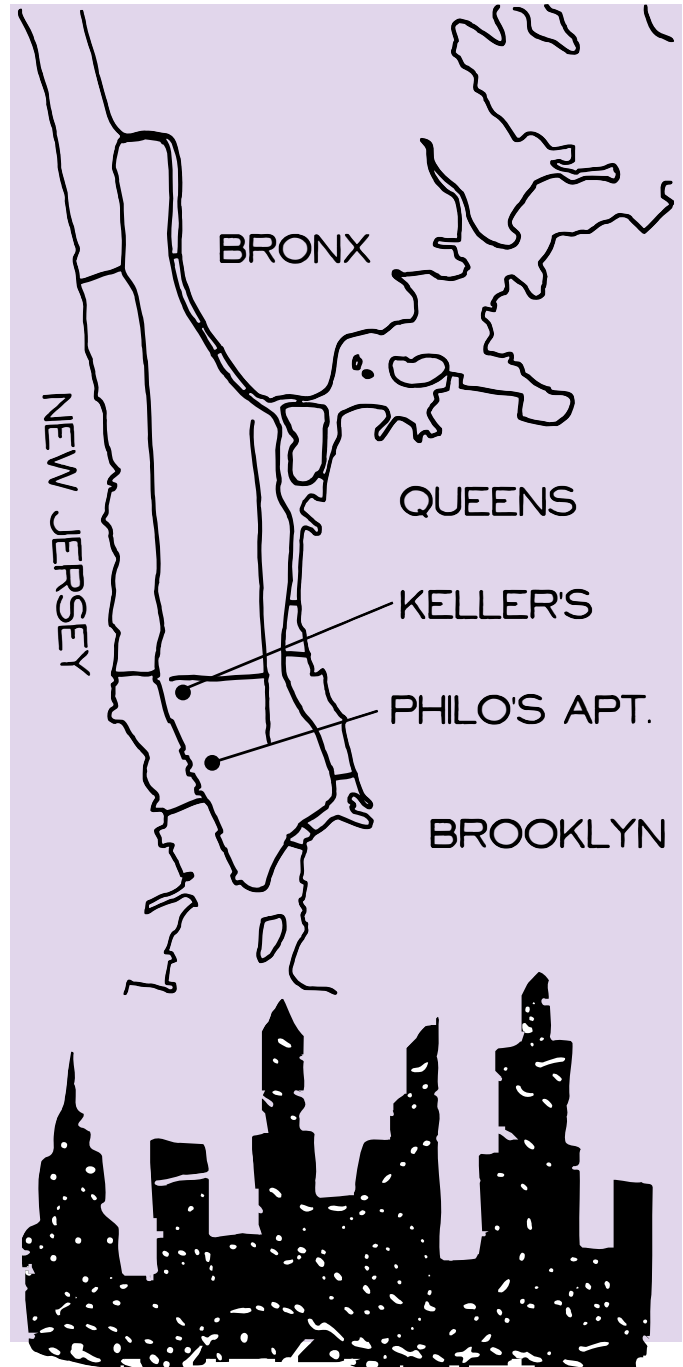
Of course, there’s plenty else in the area (Carnegie Hall, the Chrysler building, Little Italy, Times Square, the Met, not to mention less amusing places like Staten Island and Jersey City); just about all of it’s decked out big-time for Christmas. New York has its problems, but it is a city that looks *right* for the holidays. All the streetlights (even stoplights) blink a bright red-and-green, and thanks to the presence of both the magic sleigh *and* the evil Santas, it’s snowing *beautifully*.

The PCs should be allowed to go their own way in searching for the Santas – but in a city of a k’jillion people (according to the most recent census, Manhattan alone has over 1.2 k’jillion), they’re likely to need a little help. The first stages are entirely up to them, and (at the beginning, anyway) it’s wise to let their own paranoia and/or sense of Romance determine what’s important. It might occur to them that the reindeer and sleigh must be *disguised* somehow to prevent drawing unwanted attention (the reindeer can hold very still at need, so if nothing else they can just leave them on somebody’s lawn).

There are a *lot* of ways to look for Pervert Santa, in particular. Kidnapping children to use as bait, for example (or disguising the party Halfling and sending him on “lap duty” at the nearest department store).

However, there are *hundreds* of perverts dressed as Santa Claus in New York at Christmastime, which can make the search very frustrating.

Don’t allow it to be frustrating for more than a few minutes. Let them get their sea legs, introduce your take on New York City, and improvise amusing NPCs at need for as long as the players are having fun poking around. While they’re *still* having fun, throw the next encounter at them. It’s time to meet Philo.



Philo Hackdream: Santa Hunter

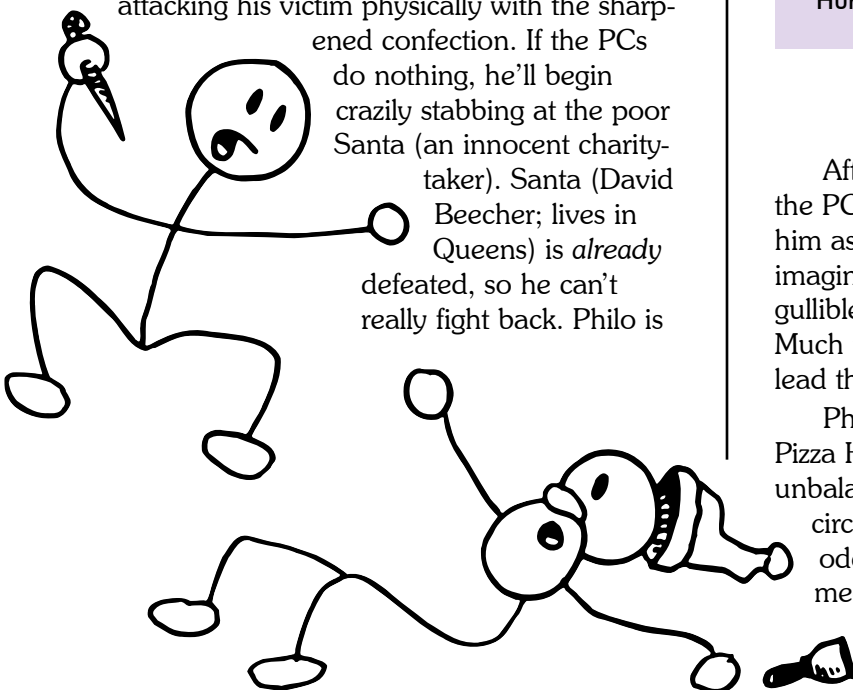
Begin with some Groovy Boxed Text, prepared just for you:

Just when you thought [neighborhood] was devoid of leads, you hear a scream from a nearby street corner! Through the falling snow, you can just make out the unmistakable figure of Santa Claus, being attacked by an angry man in a large trench coat. The latter figure has knocked Santa to the ground, sending a brass bell clattering across the icy pavement.

“Eat sugar, wicked Claus!” shouts the attacker, and pulls a dangerous-looking sharpened candycane from his coat. The “Santa” beneath him cries out for help.

This is New York, so several passers-by are simply weaving around the scene as if it weren't happening. It's up to the PCs to do something, and fast. They have encountered Philo Hackdream: Santa Hunter.

Philo is, believe it or not, basically one of the good guys. He's deluded, though, and he's attacking his victim physically with the sharpened confection. If the PCs do nothing, he'll begin crazily stabbing at the poor Santa (an innocent charity-taker). Santa (David Beecher; lives in Queens) is *already* defeated, so he can't really fight back. Philo is



so lame that the best he can manage in victory is to have Santa pinned helplessly while he pokes him ineffectually with candy.

As soon as the PCs show themselves, Philo will yell to them: “Help me, good citizens! There is an evil scourge upon the city and his name is Saint Nick!” He'll point to the helpless Santa repeatedly, and grin like a maniac.

The PCs might choose to help Philo harm the helpless Claus, or they might realize that Philo is an idiot and put a stop to the “fight.” Either way, prevent Philo from being *killed* if the PCs take a bloodthirsty approach. Just slyly suggesting that Philo might know something will almost certainly do the trick; PCs are suckers for questioning defeated NPCs.

PHILO HACKDREAM: SANTA HUNTER

Description: Until this Christmas, Philo Hackdream was an ordinary flake, a paranoid student of the occult and self-styled “vampire hunter.” He walks in a low, cautious stoop, eyeing every corner, and constantly talks in psychobabble and dubious occult references. He'll talk your ear off about banker conspiracies, government cover-ups of UFOs, and the normal drivel that flakes tend to go on about, but especially about his latest obsession: Santa Hunting. They'd get Dan Akroyd to play him in the movie, so if you do a good impression, go for it.

Clichés: Tireless Occult Investigator (2), Vampire-Hunter (1), Food-Service Lifer (3)

Talking With Philo

After the incident is over (however it turns out), the PCs will have an opportunity to talk to Philo. Play him as an obsessive flake, constantly worried about imagined conspiracies and occult threats. He's pretty gullible, and the PCs can use this to their advantage. Much more importantly, he has information that can lead them to the real Santas.

Philo is a vampire-hunter by trade (works at a Pizza Hut to pay his share of the rent), a mentally-unbalanced believer in various occultish things, with a circle of equally flaky friends. For years, he and his oddball companions have partaken of natural medicines, eaten lots of health food, and stalked the streets looking for specters and vampires with which to do battle.

Philo will gladly share all this information; he likes discussing his hobbies. In particular, he's spent years investigating the shadowy "King of Vampires" who dwells somewhere in the city. Philo will admit, eventually, that he's never actually *found* any vampires at all, let alone their king. This is *absolute proof*, he maintains, of just how cunning and dangerous vampires are.

Philo's career as occult investigator was curbed sharply three weeks ago, when he was taking out a load of trash to the dumpster after a busy Friday night at the Hut. There, in the alley, was a figure who was undoubtedly (according to Philo), the *real* Santa Claus! "But he seemed *evil*," Philo will insist, shocking the PCs a good deal less than he expects to. This evil Santa Claus, Philo says, had hypnotized four winos with some sort of magical device, and was giving them bells and coats ... "And while he was doing it, he was hogging down a *ton* of discarded pizza crusts he'd found in the dumpster. You've never seen a mortal eat so heartily. It was distressing." This should tip off the PCs to the fact that the *other* half of the local festive tag-team is Gluttonous Santa.

Philo explains that he donned his leather overcoat and grabbed his satchel full of occult paraphernalia, but Santa drove him off by ringing a magic bell, giving Philo a hell of a nosebleed with the painful sound.

Philo will take a liking to the PCs fairly easily, unless they really abuse him (in which case he'll take a liking to them anyway – his self-esteem is pretty damaged). He'll offer to take them to his apartment, to get warm, have some food, and meet his friends. On the way, he'll offer them all candy canes to sharpen (not only is it fun to sharpen them, it's good for your breath). He's basically a nice guy; he's just a dink.

"Slay Bells Ring – Are You Listenin'?"

As the PCs are walking through the snow with Philo Hackdream, headed for his apartment, Philo will stop suddenly, and cock his head to one side. "Do you hear that?"

The PCs don't hear anything. Just city sounds.

"Listen!" Philo will put his ear into the snow, against walls, and then against a lamp-post (where it sticks). "It's *them*!" he shouts. "They're after me!" By

SANTA DRONE

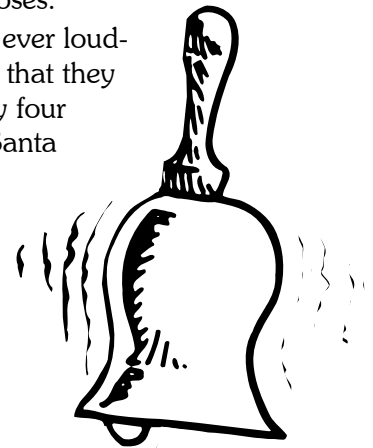
Description: These are vagrants and other dispossessed types that Gluttonous Santa has recruited for his army of well-fed wickedness. They look just like what they are: scruffy men in Santa suits, with brass bells and an iron pot on a tripod. They stand at street corners ringing their bells and collecting coins, waiting for some threat to appear so they can kill it. They are thoroughly unremarkable in combat, and have only the power of their Slay Bells with which to do battle. For important functions, they attack in really big teams.

The Slay Bells are magical sonic weapons that jangle the nerves, disrupt flesh and bone at very close range, and – worst of all – fill the mind of any victim with intense "holiday depression." Anyone *holding* a Slay Bell is immune to its effects, something the PCs will learn if they think to pluck one away from a foe. They're bonus-die magic items when used as weaponry, for either physical or emotional attacks. Any Santa Drone taken prisoner and deprived of his bell will not remember how he got where he is, or why he's dressed like Santa Claus.

Clichés: Mindless Servant (1 – they aren't even very good at *being mindless*, if you can imagine that). They attack as Cliché (2) foes, using Mindless Servant with a bonus die from the magic Slay Bells. They can form grunt squads of – at least theoretically – any value, given enough of them.

coincidence, Philo is right. Soon, the PCs can make out a strangely irritating, resonant ringing noise over the late-night traffic. Glass nearby starts to vibrate, and then crack. Philo starts making lots of little pseudo-magical gestures and taking ridiculous martial-arts poses.

As the sound grows ever louder, the PCs will discover that they are being surrounded by four scruffy-looking men in Santa Claus outfits. They are each ringing their bells and advancing with grim smiles. These are the Evil Santa Drones, armed with Slay Bells and the will to use them.



SANTA CLAUS

These stats apply to each of the “real” Kris Kringles. Santa is normally a benevolent man (or, specifically, he’s a Right Jolly Old Elf). Even at his best, though, Santa’s a neurotic obsessive, quietly maniacal for things like kindness, peace, and giving. It’s this obsessive nature that made him vulnerable to the evil force which has possessed him. Now that he’s fragmented, his unstable qualities have taken on their darkest expression, and every Santa Claus is now dangerously naughty and not very nice. If he can be rescued (which is to say, repeatedly killed), Mrs. Claus may be able to magically restore the sane and reasonable Santa Claus she once knew – a kindly fat guy in a loud red outfit, fond of playing with Elves and animals, breaking into houses, eating cookies, and stuffing socks with cologne samples.

Each of the Santas is a demonic avatar of a *different* sin, with appropriate differences in their three-die cliché. Pervert Santa, for example, is a Demonic Avatar of Lust (3), so he can hump your leg into submission, while Stuck-Up Santa is a Demonic Avatar of Vanity (3), so he can defend against nearly any assault with a zone of total self-involvement.

Clichés: Magical Christmas Icon (6), Stud Muffin (4), Demoniac Avatar of Sin (3).

Special Rules: As a Magical Christmas Icon, Santa Claus is an accomplished sorcerer of sorts, wielding Christmas Magic. Christmas Magic isn’t violent, but it can be practical in a gingerbread, cranberry, plum-duff sort of way. He can, for example, distract foes with happy childhood memories, tempting aromas of baked goods, or visions of dancing sugarplums. Given access to a hearth, Santa Claus can escape any battle he’s losing by laying a finger aside his nose. This requires a full round for the spell to work, though, in which everyone can take one last whack at him.



Beyond them, silhouetted in the falling snow, is a larger, more impressive Santa Claus. He’s directing the Santa Drones with an outstretched finger. With his other hand, he’s dumping a paper carton full of Roasted Pork Lo Mein into his mouth. Of course, he’s in silhouette right now, so the PCs might mistake it for Chicken Lo Mein. *Sinister!*

“Ho, ho, ho,” Gluttonous Santa says, between slurping sounds. “Looks like our errant pizza boy has some new friends. Hurt them, my minions! Show them what Christmas is all about. *Ho, ho.*”

Santa himself lacks the stomach for killing right now (it’s busy being the stomach for Chinese take-out), but he’ll happily let the Drones do some slaughtering for him. If the Drones are defeated (and they probably will be; they’re pretty pathetic) he’ll wade in and beat the crap out of the PCs with improvised food weaponry pulled from his pockets – he’s got entire lasagnas in there. It’s pretty nasty. If he defeats the PCs, he’ll leave them beaten and battered on the street and make good his escape (the PCs will meet him again later in the adventure). If the PCs defeat him, they’re welcome to interrogate him, but ultimately need to kill him. That’s what they’re here for.

If any of the PCs are obviously edible (you *never* know what people will play in a **Risus** game), and Gluttonous Santa defeats the PCs, he *will* consume the PC. If any PCs are killed by drones or eaten by Gluttonous Santa, they can take over Philo as a PC, perhaps.

With or without a Santa corpse in tow, they can head off to Philo’s apartment, now. If they had tried to give Philo the brush-off, you can use this fight scene to bring them back together ... Santa will attack the PCs, and Philo will come “to their rescue” – and probably need rescuing, himself.

Freakish Bohemian Christmas Party

Philo’s apartment is an old, full-sized townhouse, wedged between a holistic health food/bookstore/coffee shop/art gallery/new age supply shop on the left, and a small delicatessen on the right. All three buildings are decked out with Christmas décor, and the crunched-down snow on the sidewalk is illuminated in blinking colors.

IMPORTANT ADVENTURE-STRUCTURE THINGY

The reindeer are welcome to hide out at Philo’s place, but they can’t accompany the PCs to Keller’s. This isn’t a hard sell; they’d obviously stick out like ... like caribou in a store. They’ll prefer to either stay with the sleigh (if they’re guarding it on a lawn somewhere) or with Philo’s roommates (if they’ve been invited to the apartment). Gloria likes Blitzen a lot.

As the PCs duck inside with Philo, they're overwhelmed by the smell of pine-spray and incense. CDs and old cassette-tapes with titles like "Songs of the Earth Mother," "Druidic Jazz and Meditation Soundtrack" and so on are scattered on top of the stereo, and paintings of naked people climbing pyramids and arching meaningfully cover the walls. Many of the paintings also feature dolphins. Three other people are in the room, seated around a small artificial Christmas tree and chanting in time with the lights (they're the fancy kind that flash, strobe, chase each other around, pulse in alternating colors and so on). They've got a music-video channel on the tube, but the sound is muted. Philo will fetch some hot beverages and introduce everyone around. His friends are:

- **Fred Hackdream:** This is Milo's brother. They look a lot alike, but Fred's occult wardrobe is a bit more eastern. He's recently achieved mastery of Yoga and become a "Spiritual Guru" through a correspondence course. He'll show everybody his diploma and ask them if they'd like to hear about an investment opportunity in the rapidly-growing tea oil industry.
- **Cathy Fields:** An almost dangerously thin girl with a peasant dress and beads on, Cathy is cultivating a 1960s aesthetic this week. She's Fred's girlfriend, and she supports both Fred and three cages full of ferrets. She'll offer moral critique to anyone wearing anything made from animals, plants, or petroleum.
- **Gloria Mainer:** Gloria has a vaguely spaced-out air, but she's immediately friendly, even physically affectionate, with nearly everyone she meets. She's *especially* fond of anyone with an "S" sound in their name. She insists that S is a "magic sex letter," and that it's "sublime in its sensual significance." She'll attach herself to the arm of one of the PCs and talk of Stonehenge, the healthy nature of group sex, and how even artificial Christmas trees are possessed of souls, because children need them to be.

In **Risus** terms, they're identical, with only the Well-Meaning Flake (2) cliché to call their own.

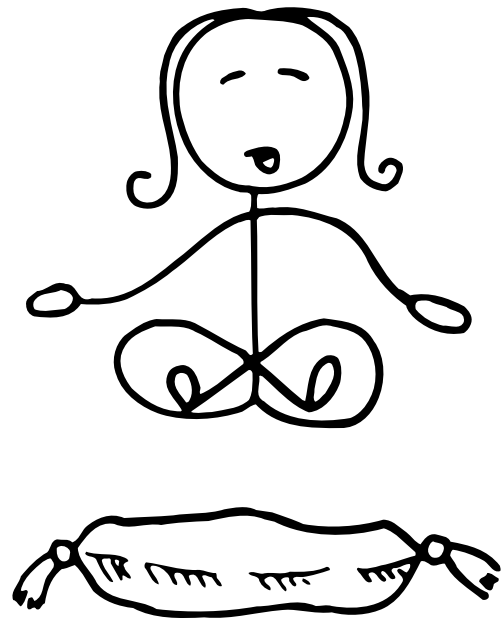
Philo, for his part, will regale the group with the story of how he met the PCs, and he'll paint them in a very flattering light. Everyone here is committed to both vampire-hunting and – because they trust Philo's

instincts – Santa hunting. If the PCs brought a Santa Corpse with them, the roomies will be excited to see it "You *got* him, Philo! Good for you!" They'll be a little upset to learn that there's more than *one* real Santa Claus needing to be killed.

Play up these characters for all they're worth. They're friendly but perhaps *too* friendly (especially Gloria, whose overtures are anything but subtle); the idea should be to give a comfortable sense of an off-beat but happy family, of sorts, not to inspire the PCs to want to kill all of them. Not now, anyway; we need them around to get killed *later*.

Philo's Got A Secret

Eventually Philo should realize that there's more than one Santa Claus. If the PCs don't tell him outright, let him deduce it from their conversation, or let him become very curious about why Santa was so outrageously gluttonous. Either way, he's got something useful for the PCs. He's been keeping an eye on the Santa Drones (which is why Gluttonous Santa was keeping an eye on *him*), and he's decided that the center of their activity on 34th street, in a major shopping district ... and specifically at Keller's, one of New York's most famous multi-story department



I think I've been cruel enough to these stupid characters without abusing Cathy in a caption.

stores. He believes the center is Keller's, in particular, because of a recent newspaper article. He's got a clipping handy (see the "Child Trouble at Keller's" clipping in the Player Handouts).

<p>goals in the with a staff of is the core of yond that core their fingernails acceptable. At gly are the vic- ancer of moral</p>	<h2 style="color: red;">Child Trouble At Keller's?</h2> <p style="color: red;">Arnold "Lefty" Goldblatt, manager of Keller's department store on West 34th Street, has refused comment on a</p>	<p>British inspection and are stopped the high seas by addition to fuelin U.S. and its all detail to remen turns to the dock years.</p> <p>In the winte loosens neutrali Britain to buy and other was American citizen permitted to sail</p>
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Hackdream thinks that this is final, clinching evidence that the evil Santa Claus was/is operating out of Keller's. If the PCs have mentioned that they're looking for a "Pervert Santa" in particular, he'll be even more adamant. If he still thinks they've already met the *only* evil Santa, he'll be interested in "cleaning out the minions" or (if Santa defeated the PCs) tracking down Claus himself for another go. Regardless, he intends to check the place out. Are they with him?

The PCs, if they are *very* clever, will say "no thanks," and go check out the store on their own. If they are only marginally clever, they'll agree to go along with Philo. Philo will set aside his sharpest Vampire-Slayer wardrobe, and hit the hay, reading "Zolar" books until he snoozes. The PCs (and the Reindeer, if Philo knows about them) are welcome to crash for the night.

KELLER'S DEPARTMENT STORE SECURITY

Description: These are the watchmen for Keller's. At night, they happily scarf down stale éclairs while watching the Playboy Channel in the security room (it's more interesting than the security monitors). During the daytime, they average about five years younger, and seem more awake.

Clichés (Day Shift): Oblivious Rent-A-Cop (2). They can manage up to four dice as a squad.

Clichés (Night Shift): Entirely Oblivious Rent-A-Cop (1). If there's a ruckus that alerts a dozen of them at once, they can form large grunt squads worth as many as two dice, total.

Keller's Department Store

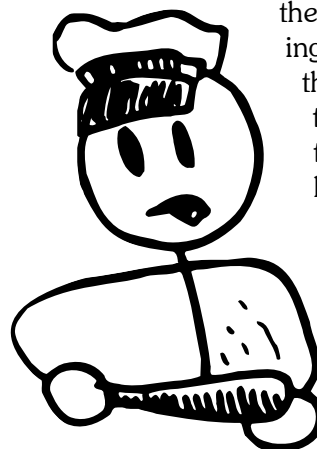
Keller's is a huge building, or at least it was pretty huge when they built it in 1928. It's 40 stories, not *all* of which is the department store, of course. The lower floors house offices, a bank, two restaurants, and so on. But an astounding portion of the building is *shopping heaven*. Oh, but for an eternity and a Gold Card!

This is a department store of the Old School – the elevators each have a uniformed operator, and each floor houses just one or two departments, each with its own experts and department heads ... You've got a single floor for Hardware, a single floor for Ladies' Lingerie (bound to be popular with some PCs), a single floor for Sporting Goods (a good source for makeshift weapons, armor, and expensive tents), a single floor for Books, and so on. Fun for all, but a little pricey, especially the clothing and furniture.

During the daytime, the building is packed solid with Christmas shoppers, all bundled up and bickering at each other. The lines stretch to a theoretical infinity, and the heat is as oppressive as the omnipresent Christmas muzak and glittery holiday displays (mostly animated Elf statues nodding and waving while standing amid sheets of plastic snow). The walls and ceiling are extravagantly draped in reds, greens, and sparkling metallic ribbons. At the top of each huge archway between departments, a decorator has seen fit to hang a giant replica of a golden tree-ornament decked with a huge red velvet ribbon.

During the night there are six watchmen on duty. At any given time, there will be three on the ground floor, two on patrol through the building, and one in

the watchmen's room watching the Playboy Channel and eating stale éclairs. They trade off through the night. The nighttime is definitely the best time to make an organized hit on the place, but the possibilities of shopping-hours fun are juicy (see sidebar for some examples). Visiting in the daytime is the best way to see Santa Claus in action with the kids, too.

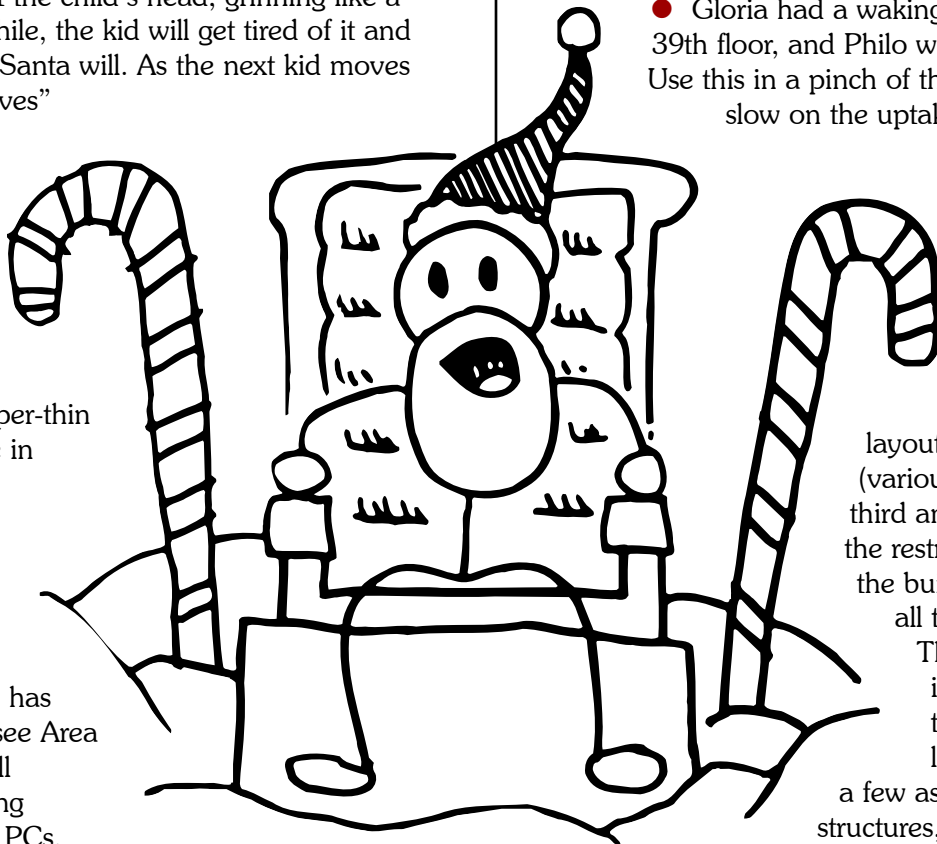


Santa's Head-Patting Throne

Santa works from a gigantic stage set up on the upper floor of the toy department (which occupies the 16th and 17th stories of the building). A giant roped-off line is manned by bored store employees wearing Elf-costumes. Hundreds of kids line up at a time, willing to wait for hours if need be to sit on Santa's lap and demand toys. Santa's surrounds consist of more glitter-covered props than a sane man can comprehend at once. Simply witnessing the display could result in a combat between a weak-willed PC and the garish, monstrous insanity of the décor (if the décor wins, the PC will be unable to stomach the sight of glitter for months).

Just as the newspaper reported, this Santa *does* seem to have some sort of head-patting fixation. As each child sits on his lap, he begins his usual banter: "We-ell! Ho, ho! And what do YOU want for Christmas, little one?" When the kid starts answering, Santa's eyes glaze over and he raises his hand and starts to slowly pat the child's head, grinning like a maniac. After a while, the kid will get tired of it and say "quit it." And Santa will. As the next kid moves into place, the "Elves" give the exiting child is a small bag containing a candy cane, a lollipop, and a cheap plastic toy (a boat or airplane made of paper-thin plastic somewhere in Taiwan).

When Santa's work shift ends (at 8:30pm), he'll head directly for the offices upstairs, where he has a dressing room (see Area 17, below). He will ignore the gathering reporters, and the PCs.



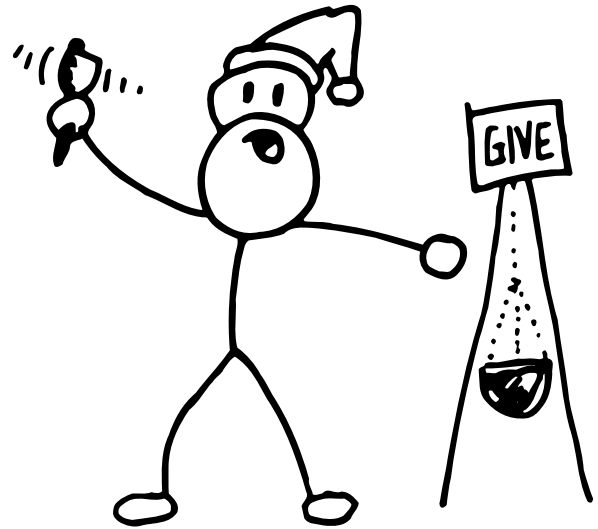
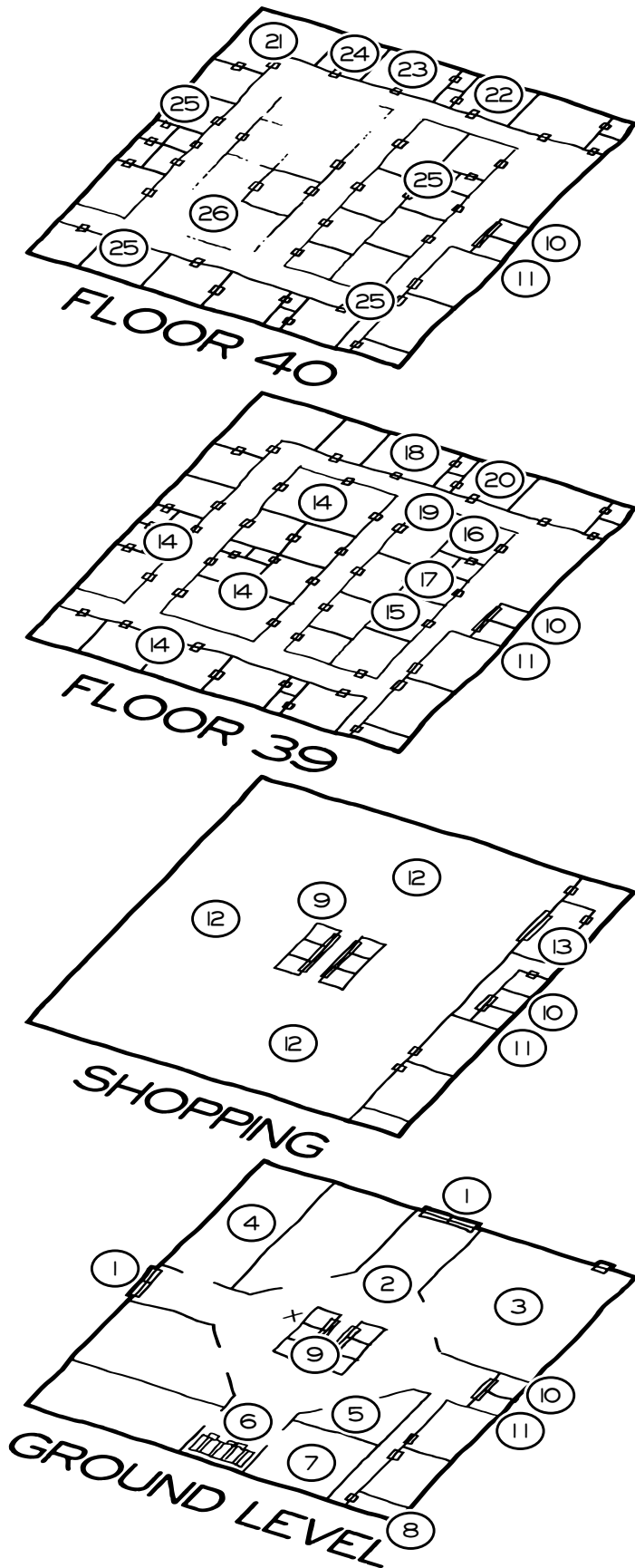
Jolly, Generous, and an Experienced Phrenologist

The Part Where the Store Becomes a Dungeon Module

Eventually, the evidence should tempt the PCs toward the off-limits upper floors of Keller's. Enhance the temptation by making sure the PCs realize the following:

- This is where the Santa goes when his shift is over. He does not seem to leave the building at any point, as the most insistent reporters have failed to get an interview. Either he's sleeping here, or he has a secret way out.
- There are lots of cool "Stay Out" and "Executive Staff Members Only: Restricted!" signs on every stairwell leading upwards beyond the store areas.
- The public elevators don't go into the restricted floors; only the executive elevators do (and they, too, are marked "off limits").
- Gloria had a waking vision about the 39th floor, and Philo wants to check it out. Use this in a pinch if the PCs seem a little slow on the uptake.

The first (lowest) map shows the ground floor – this'll help for dealing with security. The second map moving up shows a typical layout of a shopping level (various functions). The third and fourth maps show the restricted top two floors of the building, which is where all the cool stuff happens. The roof also can come into play in the adventure, but it's just a large square area with a few assorted miniature structures, like on TV.



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 – McTraicher’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

\$5.95!” The meal includes a turkey burger slathered with gravy, a plastic cup of eggnog with a straw, three large yam-nuggets, and a small order of chestnut stuffing deep-fried into little tater-tot style balls.

Area 5 – Rapid-Fire™ Print Shop: This is a print-and-copy shop. Nothing interesting or useful here, but you never know what PCs may need in the middle of an adventure. Anyone seeking to print a PDF file must face an extensive criminal background check and pay an \$85 ripping fee (but apart from that, it’s just 74¢ per page).

Area 6 – McCready’s Newsstand: Old Man McCready, if asked very discreetly, has a supply of head-patting magazines for sale for \$8 each, or \$12 for a bundle of four leftover magazines from previous months. They are much like the ones in **Area 15**, below.

Area 7 – Nasty Little Hobbies: A gratuitous game/comic-book/nipponophenalia retailer. There’s a pretty cool sculpture of a Gollum-esque character out front during business hours, holding a golden ring aloft and dancing on what is presumably meant to represent a volcanic precipice. The proprietor, Neil, seems to specialize in vinyl kits of naked and nearly-naked anime girls (with a sideline in Queen Amidala statuettes, circa the ripped-midriff white costume). He likes to argue about *Star Trek*, *Star Wars*, *Blake’s 7* and (most especially) the American *Dr. Who* made-for-TV movie. Whatever stance the PCs take on the matter; he takes the opposite position with a sneer of contempt; this can result in a titanic battle – Neil has a devastating Opinionated Fan (5) cliché. If he defeats a PC, the PC’s cliché *cannot heal* until he’s *either* purchased something extra-expensive and “cool” from Neil, to salve his shattered nerves, or until he’s played a prank on Neil that involves public nudity.

Area 8 – Watchmen’s Room: A small, unremarkable room with a TV set on a corner rack, a table, a small fridge, a coffee maker, and two vending machines (one for junk food, one for cigarettes). During the day, there will be 1-6 security here. During the night, there will be a single night watchman.

Area 9 – Public Elevators: These lead into the stores proper. They are locked at night and manned by operators in the day. They do not go higher than the public shopping departments.

EXPANDING THE SCENE: NYC STREET ENCOUNTERS

Why You Little ... : Pick a random PC and tell him that he has lost his wallet (or belt-pouch or whatever he keeps his cash in). A little kid can be seen running away down a nearby alley.

Hey Man Check This Out: A spotty-faced kid in his late teens accosts the PCs and tries to show them his switchblade. He’s not threatening them or anything, he just the sort of kid who wanders the streets showing people his switchblade.

Slayer Santas: A man dressed like Santa Claus and wielding a brass bell can be seen standing near a street-corner by a Salvation Army pot. This is one of the mind-slaves of Santa, the Claus Corps of “Santa Drones” (see page 18). He’s armed with a Slay Bell, and will use it if he suspects the PCs.

Not Everyone is An Enemy: As above, but it’s a legitimate Salvation Army dude.

“You Call Taxi:” A taxi pulls up and the driver insists that the PCs called for it. He doesn’t speak any English beyond that.

That Was Odd: A homeless woman approaches the PCs and asks an eerily pertinent question, and then walks away. If the PCs follow her, they find only a dog-eared copy of “X” Magazine.

Why You (Not Quite As) Little ... : A man in a black limousine spits out of his window, hitting the weapon or scabbard of one of the PCs’ warrior-types.

A Mime is a Terrible Thing to Waste: A mime follows one of the PCs and imitates his every move. He’ll go away only if the PCs give him a few bucks. He’ll become a running gag throughout the adventure, showing up in the middle of combat scenes, in later chapters, whenever – mimicking the same PC’s movements. In each case, he’ll require more money than last time before he’ll leave. He’ll never say a word, and if he’s killed (he’s only got a couple of dice in Mime, and no other useful clichés to speak of) his brother will pick up the business where he left off – but tormenting a *different* Player Character.

Area 10 – Executive Elevator: This elevator can only be opened by keying in an appropriate six-digit code number, or by beating an appropriate Target Number (clichés like Superspy or Cat-Burglar have the best chances, with Difficulty 10; other clichés

face higher numbers). Those less fond of discretion can always try either beating up an executive for his code number, or just blowing stuff up.

Area 11 – Stairs: Steel-and-concrete stairway leading from the bottom to the top of the building. The doors leading to restricted floors have electronic locks like the one on the elevator, but the stairwells do go all the way to the top floor.

Map Key: Typical Shopping Level

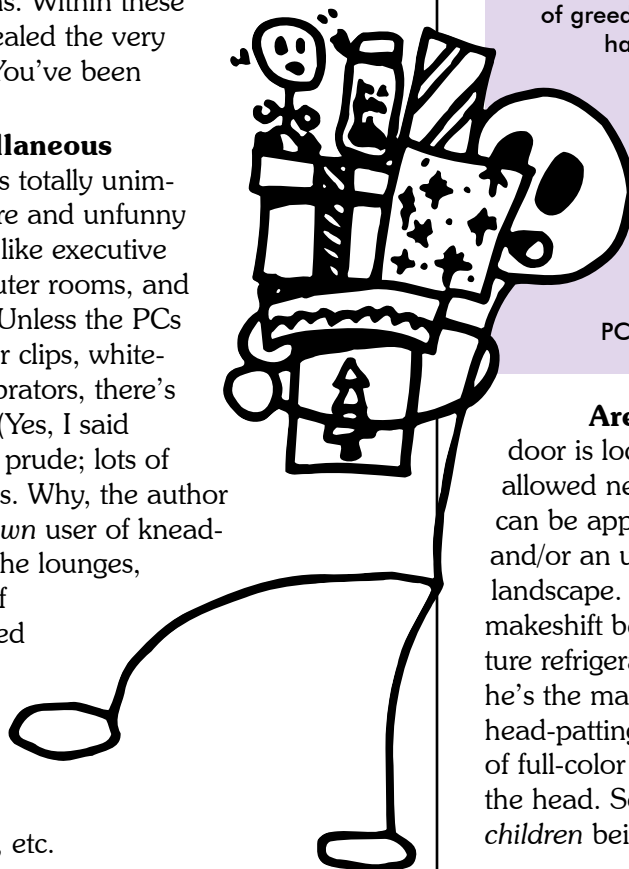
Area 12 – Islands: Nice, carpeted places with overpriced merchandise and pushy salespeople on them.

Area 13 – Department Office: This is a walk-up counter where you can get catalogues and credit info, lodge complaints, have things gift-wrapped, et cetera. Also good when you can't find something.

Map Key: The 39th Floor

Read this floor carefully! This is where the climax begins. Within these darkened halls are revealed the very heart of Santa's *evil*. You've been warned.

Area 14 – Miscellaneous Areas: These are areas totally unimportant to the adventure and unfunny in the extreme. Things like executive lounges, offices, computer rooms, and slide-theaters go here. Unless the PCs want a fortune in paper clips, white-out, Quaaludes and vibrators, there's nothing here for them (Yes, I said paper clips. Don't be a prude; lots of people have paper clips. Why, the author of this module is a *known* user of kneaded-rubber erasers). In the lounges, the PCs will spot lots of Gluttonous Santa related debris – huge piles of pizza boxes, small hills of Chinese take-out cartons, candy wrappers gathered up like snowdrifts, etc.



EXPANDING THE SCENE: SHOPPING HIJINKS

The Shoplifter: The PCs notice an odd little man with a huge overcoat stuffing merchandise (tents, ceiling fans, bicycles) into his overcoat. If they report him, the store security will thank them, but then do nothing about it! If they apprehend the shoplifter themselves, the man will stutter in fury and shout for the security guards! This is Gene Keller, the owner, who has a shoplifting fetish.

Mad Rush: Just as the PCs are hitting one of the two floors of the Toy Department, a pair of employees come up on the freight elevator leading a dolly full of boxes and a large painted "SALE" sign. They set the boxes up in a pyramid and then unveil them – it's *this year's trend toy!* That's right, whatever \$200 piece of rubbish the kids are screaming for this season, the kind of toy that turns determined mothers into clawing, screeching she-beasts. In any case, tease the PCs with this; try to entice one of them to pick one up to examine it (if you have to be sneaky, tell them they spot something different about the box on top of the pyramid). When they have it in hand, 100 screaming mothers, frothing at the mouth and yelling at the top of their lungs, converge on the pile of overpriced toys like a swarm of locusts. In a flurry of greed, the pyramid of toys will vanish, and the hapless PC will realize that he's now holding the only unpurchased unit in the entire store. The moms are a brutal Grunt Squad with the cliché, Horde of Screaming Mothers (4). This could be the death of the PC (in which case he'll be sorely missed and recalled forever as a Christmas Martyr). No body will ever be found – only a stain on the linoleum and some object that the dead PC held dear.

Area 15 – Santa's Dressing room: This door is locked at all times, and nobody will be allowed near it without a struggle in the daytime. It can be approached at night with sufficient stealth and/or an unconscious trail of rent-a-cops littering the landscape. Once inside, the PCs will find a small makeshift bedroom, with a cot, a TV set, and a miniature refrigerator. Santa Claus (his real name is Hiram; he's the manager's brother) is sleeping here. A pile of head-patting magazines is on the floor, featuring lots of full-color photos of people patting each other on the head. Some of the more risqué magazines show *children* being patted on the head.

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,

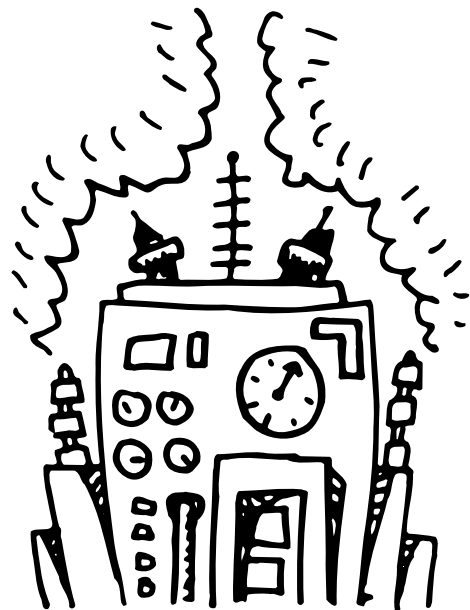
however (he either saw them take it, or heard Santa bragging about it, depending on how things went down).

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

scene of the evil Santas' next diabolical plot (it's set up to allow the local Santas to rendezvous with their brethren on the "England Mission"). At any rate, smart PCs *will* realize that the gate must be manifesting on the roof somewhere, since this room barely exists in this reality to begin with.

Area 19 – Pervert Santa's Room: This is a simply appointed makeshift bedroom with a large, comfortable bed, several Santa Claus outfits, and an *underage* Yak wearing "Incredible Hulk" Underoos.

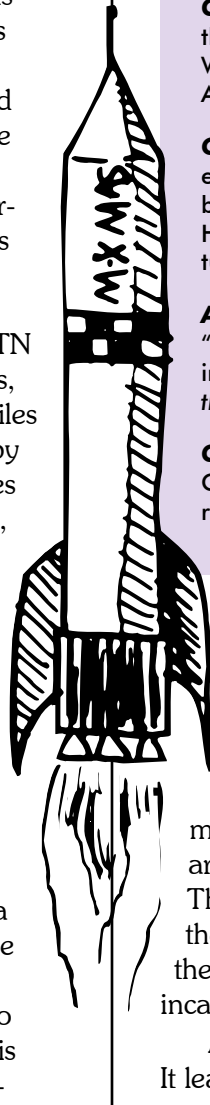
Area 20 – Gluttonous Santa's Room: This seems to be an emergency storage closet to feed thousands of people in the event of an apocalypse. Then, the PCs notice the bed.

Map Key: The 40th Floor

Area 21 – Secret Missile Launchers: This rather huge chamber occupies part of floor 39, as well. There's a platform where the PCs can stand safely. The rest of the room is filled with racks and racks of tactical long-range nuclear missiles (in the very low kiloton range). It's pretty easy (Target Number 10 at most) for any computer-savvy character to check out the computer guidance systems and discover that they are locked onto major department and toy stores (and warehouses) throughout North America. A more difficult roll (TN 15 or so) will let a PC re-set the guidance systems, if they have a mind to nuke something. The missiles are designed to slag the evidence as they leave, by the way – a fail-safe mechanism keeps the missiles from firing while the room is occupied. Of course, that mechanism is keyed into the electronic lock, and if the PCs have broken that to get in the room ...

Area 22 – Roof Elevator Room: The sleigh is here. This entire chamber can be raised to the roof, allowing the sleigh to take off. The controls for the elevator room are on the north wall, and easy to operate.

Area 23 – Meeting in Progress: This is a locked meeting-room with light coming from under the door. The PCs might want to exercise a little stealth here. If they do, and listen through the door, they will hear a discussion of a plan to destroy every toy retail center in the world, and to give away any toys that survive in the rubble. This will further Envy's plans by undermining and ulti-



A CHRISTMAS MOVIE QUIZ!

To get your gaming group in the perfect holiday mood, have a character-creation night with eggnog and popcorn balls and candy canes and some classic Christmas movies. Or, if you're feeling particularly evil, some less-than-classic Christmas movies like the ones listed below. But ... *which of these movies are real*, and which are just sneaky **Risus** jokes? Answer on page 57.

Christmas Lilies of the Field: A years-later sequel to a great Sidney Poitier movie. Only its about Christmas, and doesn't have Sidney Poitier in it. Stick to playing Lando, Billy Dee.

An American Christmas Carol: Like *A Christmas Carol* except set in New England in the Great Depression ... with Henry "Fonzie" Winkler as Mister Scrooge.

Christmas Comes to Willow Creek: Starring both of the Dukes of Hazzard (John Schneider and Tom Wopat) as quarrelling brothers trucking gifts to Alaska.

One Magic Christmas: Mom doesn't believe enough in Christmas, so Dad gets shot dead and both children are kidnapped and drowned. Then Harry Dean Stanton shows up. A Disney family feature.

A Smoky Mountain Christmas: This time Henry "Fonzie" Winkler is directing, while Dolly Parton stars in a Christmas movie based on ... *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*.

Christmas in Connecticut: Not the Sidney Greenstreet original from the 1940s. I mean the remake directed by Arnold Schwarzenegger.

mately destroying the "commercial" side of Christmas, leaving Santa Claus and the North Pole as the only source of holiday toys. Insert Evil Executive Laughter here.

If the PCs just bust in and start throwing knuckles around, they can do away with the mind-controlled execs without any difficulty: they are, collectively, a Pack of Simpering Yes-Men (1). The PCs can deduce the plan, anyway, from all of the "Christmas Eve Giveaway" posters displayed on the walls, or Santa will gloat it to them later. No incarnation of Santa Claus is present for the meeting.

Area 24 – Stairway to Roof: This is a stairway. It leads to the roof.

HOW TO USE A RISUS MAP

The map on page 23 is a lot like the other maps you'll see in *A Kringle in Time*, which is to say: it looks suspiciously like a serious adventure-module map that might be used to track the location of the Player Characters. Please don't be fooled by this.

The maps are a mix of utter rubbish (*attractively doodled utter rubbish*) and comfort for the Game Master. If the PCs ever suspect you're just hedging them along toward the next interesting area, you can flash them the map, say "see?" and the map will pass any kind of cursory inspection. Of course, between Evil Game Masters, we can know that the actual method to using a *Risus* map is to **(A)** Look at it, say "Cool. A map," and then **(B)** Let it give you a general idea of the feel of the place, and then **(C)** just hedge the PCs along toward the next interesting area.

Area 25 – The Bride of Mutant

Miscellaneous Areas From Planet X: If anything, these miscellaneous areas are even *more* miscellaneous than those that comprise **Area 14**.

Area 26 – Big Climactic Gloating and

Fighting Scene Area: This is the area where the Big Climactic Gloating and Fighting Scene takes place. Specifically, it is a large, burned-out area of offices replaced by a hastily-assembled throne and lots of burning Christmas decorations. Seated on a mighty throne is Pervert Santa. If the PCs let Gluttonous Santa get away from them earlier, he's here too, scarfing down a bag of McTraicher's food happily. If he lost some cliché dice earlier, they may not be fully healed yet, depending on the nature of the damage.

A crackling fire burns in a chimney behind them, and several figures (the flakes from Philo's place, and Philo if the PCs left him behind), are tied up on the floor with Christmas ribbons. A half-dozen Santa drones stand with Slay Bells at the ready.

HOW TO HEDGE PCs ALONG TO THE NEXT INTERESTING AREA

With decades of gaming experience to draw on for this, I can somewhat reluctantly but very certainly confirm that if you hint to *any* group of players that there is an unusual fried-chicken smell coming from the direction you'd like them to explore, they will eagerly investigate.

Pervert Santa stands to greet the PCs, saying something along the lines of "OH-HO! HO! Welcome, little friends! Don't step closer – that would be naughty!" The drones chime in with a few "Ho ho's" of their own. "And if little boys and girls are naughty, their friends will be harmed! OH-HO! HO!" By "friends," he means Philo's roommates (and possibly Philo). The PCs may or may not actually care. Gloria, despite her possible impending doom, stares lovingly at Santa Claus saying "S-s-s-ssssanta" over and over again. Sublime in it's significance, you know.



The Big Climactic Gloating and Fighting Scene

Before the PCs can get to Santa Claus (or Santa Clauses), they have six Drones to wade through. Santa himself can't be engaged easily without getting at *least* half the drones out of the way. When Pervert Santa *does* fight, he does so with massive, hammer-like fists, peppermint-scented sorcery using twisted, dark Christmas Magic, and by leaping on PCs and humping their legs screaming "tell Santa what you want for Christmas! Santa knows what you want, oh yes he does. You've been naughty and Santa likes it!"

And so forth. If you have any easily-embarrassed players, show them no mercy. If you have any first-time gamers learning what RPGs are like from this adventure ... Shame on you. And shame on me.

Beyond that, be sure and charge the scene with plenty of "Ho, Ho, Ho's" and Santa's gloating. He'll talk about how he's gonna take over Christmas, how powerful he is – all that good villain stuff. More to the point, he'll sarcastically thank the PCs for bringing him the sleigh so as to make his job easier. There are



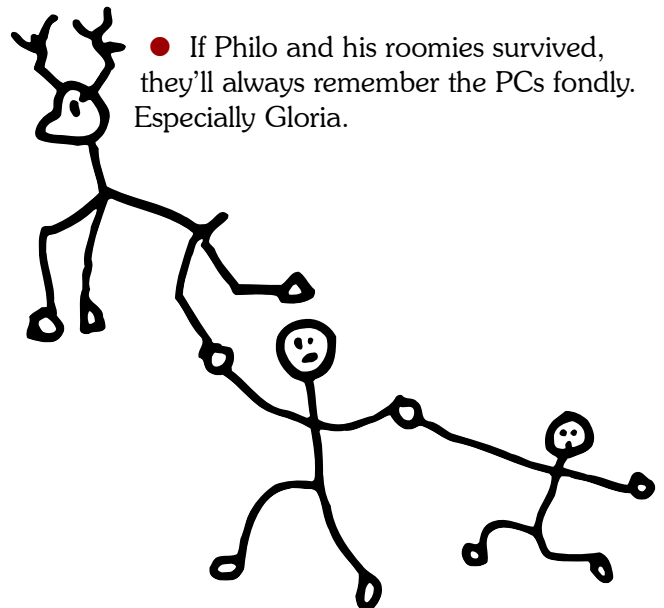
several kinds of climax (oh my) this scene could build toward. Here's how Santa will act depending on how things are going:

- If the PCs are doing extremely well, Santa will attempt to flee, going for the sleigh and aiming it at the Beckoning Cosmic Gateway on the Roof (even *Santa* can't make the sleigh time-travel unless a reindeer is pulling it; Reindeer are vital to the time-travel process ... but *Santa* can make it fly by using the rocket boosters).
- If the PCs are doing extremely well and Santa can't get to the sleigh, he'll just head for the Beckoning Cosmic Gateway to leap through on his own.
- If the PCs are doing very poorly, Santa will gloat very informatively, talking about how he's going to nuke people and give away toys and get totally laid for doing it.
- If the PCs are doing very *very* poorly, one of the tied-up schmucks from Philo's apartment will knock him out by grabbing a heavy object and whacking him on the back of the head. Unfortunately, it's probably some kind of sex toy. More unfortunately, it's probably Gloria doing it, and now she'll have *ideas*. Yeesh.

If there are two Santas, they'll behave similarly apart from their chosen *motif*. The Beckoning Cosmic Gateway is well *over* the roof. Santa can leap that far (he's quite athletic for a big guy), and the sleigh and/or the reindeer can all reach it.

The PCs, in turn, can reach it by being in the sleigh or on the reindeer. Here's a list of loose ends and endgame goals to move things smoothly to the next chapter:

- The PCs, if they're not defeated, should remember to take the sleigh and the reindeer with them. The reindeer will remind them of this.
- The PCs should *also* remember to take any Santa Corpses along.
- The PCs can fly through the gateway if they want, but with a fully-operable sleigh and a team of reindeer handy, they don't actually *require* the gateway as Santa did.
- If the PCs didn't do anything about the nukes, they'll probably still go off and irradiate the toy-centers of America (whoopsie).
- With Pervert and Gluttonous dead, all of the Santa Drones will return to normal, and the execs of Keller's will snap out of it, too, and return to selling toys instead of plotting a global giveaway.
- Pervert Santa kept *his* stash of magazines under his mattress, and they weren't about head-patting, brother.
- If Philo and his roomies survived, they'll always remember the PCs fondly. Especially Gloria.



Chapter Three: God Bless Us, Every One

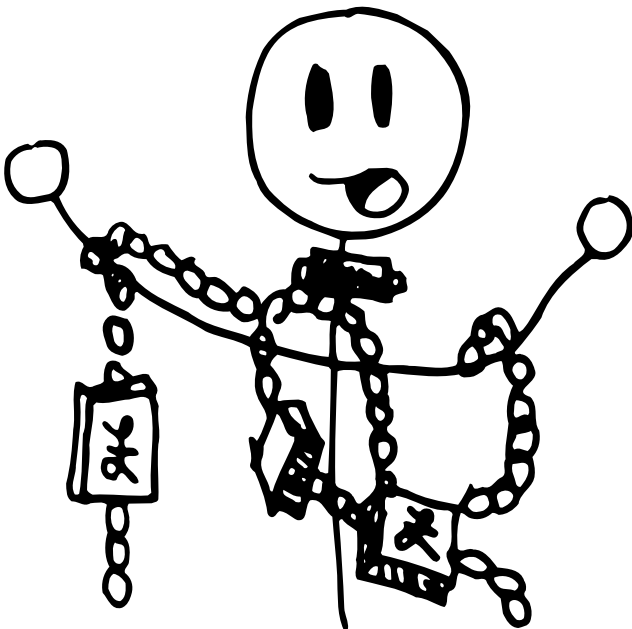
“Have you ever been to Wales, Baldrick?”

“No – But I’ve often thought I’d like to.”

“Don’t bother. You need half a pint of phlegm in your throat just to pronounce the place-names. Never ask for directions in Wales, Baldrick; you’ll be washing spit out of your hair for a fortnight.”

– Black Adder III

THE PCS BEGIN THIS CHAPTER high over the English Channel, with the glittering lamps of Portsmouth passing slowly beneath them as they fly towards London. When they reach London, Dasher will set the sleigh down in a small park. He’ll say, “It’s snowing and foggy at the same time. That’s the sleigh’s magic mixing with the local weather ... I doubt that our approach was noticed.”



Jacob Marley bears the weight of chains he forged through greed. He’s tired and miserable, but awfully glad to see the PCs ...

It’s early evening, and the year, if the meter on the sleigh is to be trusted, is 1843. The date is December 24th.

Comet trots over through the snowy gloom. “All done, Dasher. We’ve got tarps and brush over the sleigh. Where should we Reindeer hide out? I don’t think it’s best for us to wander around – we don’t look much like horses.”

The PCs can suggest anything that they like, and the Reindeer will probably accept it. The one thing that Dasher will insist on is that they keep some way of communicating. “One way or another,” he says, “there’ll probably come a time where you guys need the sleigh pronto. There’s no telling what Santa’s up to here.”

“Yeah,” says Comet, “or even which Santa it is, like.”

Smart PCs will recall that, with Envy presumably at the North Pole, and with Gluttony and Lust steaming as corpses in the sleigh, that leaves four possible suspects: Anger, Avarice, Sloth and Pride, better known as Angry Santa, Avaricious Santa, Lazy Santa and Stuck-Up Santa.

Let any necessary banter continue for a second, and then read the following Groovy Boxed Text:

You can’t help but notice that the snow, which was falling rather steadily, has now stalled in your immediate area. Strangely enough, it still seems to be snowing on the nearby streets! You look around for whatever could be stopping the snow from falling, and notice that an eerie green glow is coming from behind a nearby tree – a glowing green figure is trying to hide and watch you. The glowing figure is that of an old man, shackled and burdened with chains, cash-boxes, and scrolls. His face is tired and miserable.

This is the Ghost of Jacob Marley. He'll seem very nervous and sad. "Whhhoooooooooaaahh!" he'll say. "Pleeease! I am the Ghooooooooost of Jacob Marrrrley, and I can see with the sight of a spirit that you are not from this woorrld..." He'll look left and right. "And I need your help!" He can't hold up those extended vowels forever, but he'll use them every now and then to remind the PCs that he's a ghost.

JACOB MARLEY'S GHOST

Description: The "Jacob Marley" that the PC's encounter is a ghostly creation – a spirit summoned up by Tiny Tim from the primordial chaos to delay Avaricious Santa and manipulate the PCs. As far as Jacob knows, though, he's the genuine item, a former partner of Ebenezer Scrooge, who wants to help him avoid a terrible fate of endless tortured wandering in the afterlife. Jacob hasn't the slightest idea that "Ebenezer" is actually Santa Claus, anymore than he realizes that he isn't Jacob Marley.

Clichés: Ersatz Tortured Spirit (3), Financier (3)

Marley seems stricken with guilt. According to him, he's just come from the house of his old friend and former business partner, Ebenezer Scrooge. "He hates Christmas, you see. He is being very cruel to a very nice family, the Cratchits. I only wanted to save his soul from suffering a curse like my own ...

Marley went into Scrooge's house and promised him that he would be visited by "three spirits" who would help him fix his evil ways. "I've always been one to exaggerate," says Marley, hanging his glowing head, "there are no spirits. Nobody in the spirit world likes me enough to cooperate. I made it up."

He looks at the PCs sadly, giving them that "help-me-I'm-just-a-pathetic-non-player-character-and-I-don't-write-this-stuff" look. Will the PCs help him? Will they take on the role of his spirits?

Marley goes on to explain that it needn't be just *three*. In fact, [size of the party] would be a *perfect* number of ghosts. He'll rummage through his cash-boxes and pull out several small items, including a jar of Glo-Cream™ (a non-toxic substance that, when spread all over somebody, makes them look ghostly). He'll also dig out a "magic piece of cheese." And he'll whine and beg and be miserable and generally torment the hell out of the PCs until they agree to help him.

The Reindeer will encourage the PCs if they aren't entirely eager, pointing out that they seem to have lucked into something important. Dasher will say "The whole Scrooge story is a major Christmas image, the kind of thing Envy would want to undermine ... and if Avaricious Santa is part of this caper, he might be able to form some kind of unholy rapport with the old skinflint."

Meanwhile, in the shadows and out of sight, a tiny, evil figure watches and laughs ...

Scrooge's House

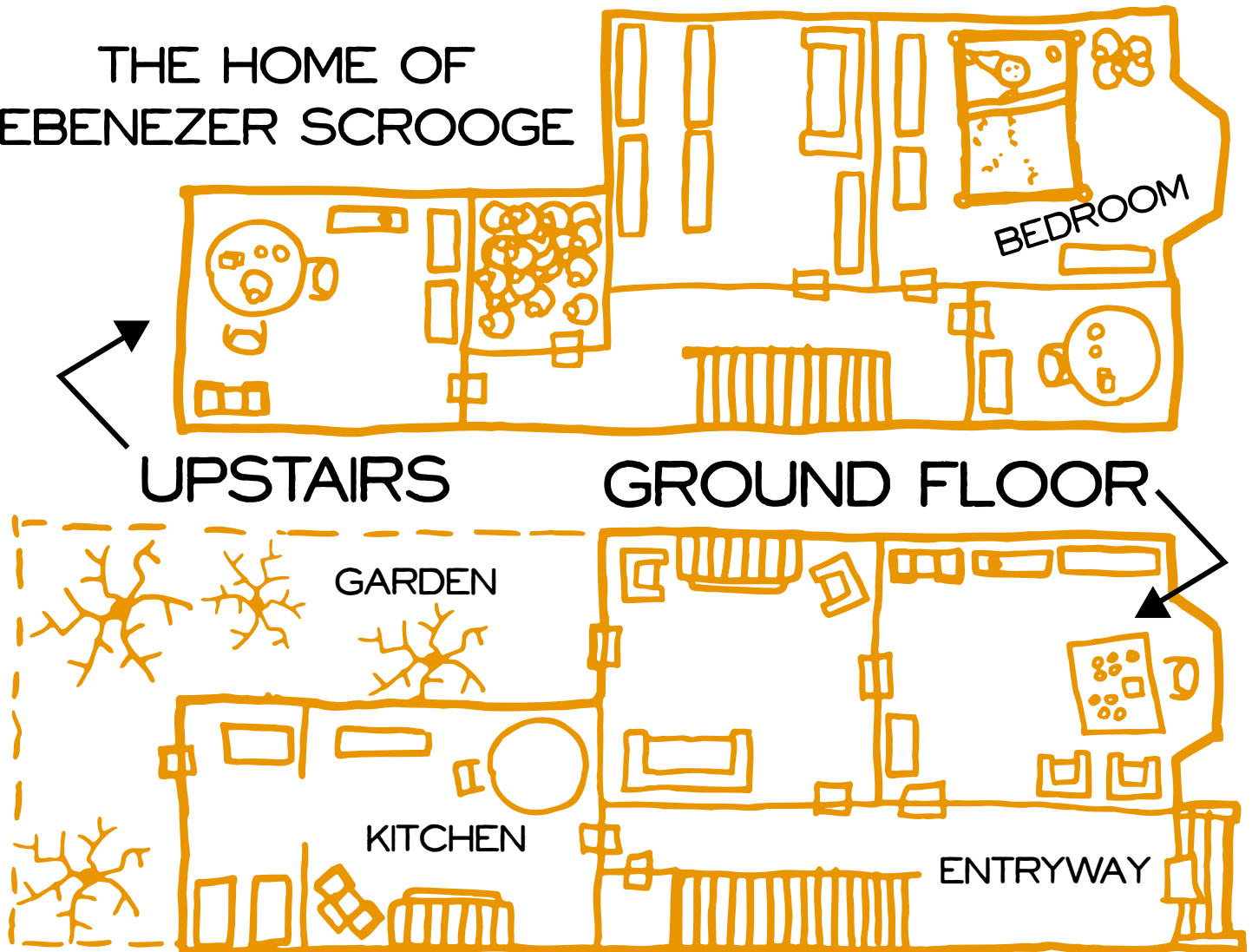
Marley will take the PCs to Scrooge's house, next door to his warehouse, his place of business. A worn, flaking sign proclaims *Scrooge and Marley: Skinflint Opportunist Bastards* to all the world. Marley sighs and drifts momentarily into a sentimental reverie. "That was *our* sign. We had such fun, foreclosing and starving the poor saps to death." A tear forms at the corner of his eye. "I've been dead these seven years, and he hasn't painted my name off the sign. I'd like to think it's out of friendship, but I know it's because paint costs good money."



At this point, he hands the Glo-Cream™ and the cheese to the PCs, who should put it on (the former, not the latter). He explains that the cheese works automatically, and just to trust it. "It's good for three bites!" he'll say. "Bite it when you've got Ebenezer's attention and it'll give you all the ghostly power you neeeeed." He waves, and goes to hide under a nearby bush to watch.

If the PCs look utterly confused, Marley will add: "Just show him his life – that will do the work for you! If Ebenezer doesn't see that Christmas is good, who knows what will become of Bob Cratchit and his family? Who knows what will become of little Tiny Tim?"

THE HOME OF EBENEZER SCROOGE



Map Key

See the map for the layout of Scrooge's house. The PCs can get in any way they please. An overview:

Doors: Both the front and garden doors are locked, but they can be picked with an easy (Difficulty 5) roll with any sort of sneak-thief cliché.

The Entryway: A short corridor with hooks in an alcove for hats and coats. Scrooge's signature grey coat and top hat are hanging here. The PCs can tell from looking at the coat that they are dealing with a robust, fat-cat "Sidney Greenstreet" sort of Scrooge, and not the emaciated Scrooge of some other portrayals. This might get them thinking.

The Kitchen: A small, coal-burning stove sits here, and upon it sits a pot of cold gruel. The coal bin nearby has dust on it – Scrooge hardly bothers to use it (it's wasteful). The PCs might notice, however, that the pot of gruel is generously large. Not Gluttonous Santa large, but possibly Santa large, otherwise.

Stairway: With every step, the stairs creak loud enough to strip paint off the walls. Fortunately, the walls are unpainted. Stealth in this area faces a minimum Difficulty 20 for *any* cliché that doesn't provide for ignoring gravity or passing through solid matter.

Scrooge's Bedroom: A large, open room with a peaked ceiling. There's a large bed surrounded by a curtain. A single window lets in plenty of bright moonlight and creepy shadows cast by the falling snow outside.

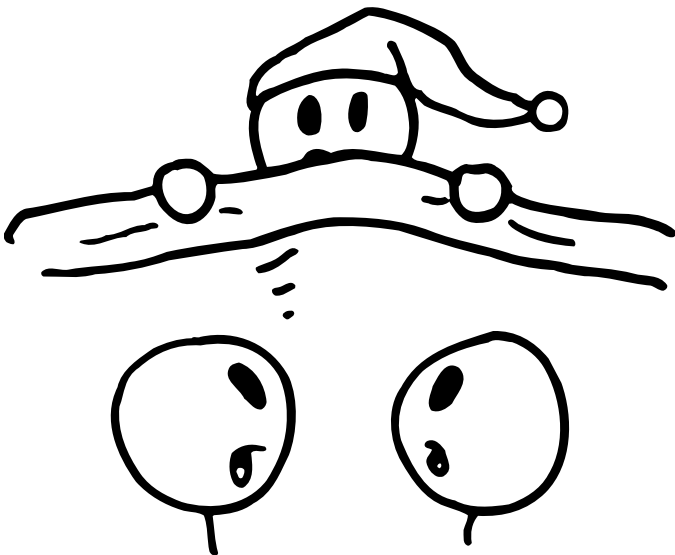
CRANBERRY DAIQUIRI

1/2 cup fresh or frozen cranberries
 1 1/2 oz. lime juice
 2 oz. rum (light)
 2 tsp. Sugar
 2 ice cubes, busted up a little



Antonio and Maria sent a few recipes in from their stash; this is a favorite on creepy nights when you're in somebody else's house, haunting them. Toss the whole lot into a blender and blend until you've got soup. Add a dash of cherry liqueur, if desired. Serve in a chilled glass with a cherry and two straws. Even Maria, a battle-hardened boozier if there ever was one, declares its level of tartness "unsettling."

Sleeping on the bed is Ebenezer Scrooge – or is it? The PCs can't help but notice that this Ebenezer Scrooge looks a *lot* like a Santa Claus ... Chubby ... white beard ... hmm. However, far from being dressed in garish red, Ebenezer is dressed in a knee-length white nightshirt and matching cap. He's waking up, and looking at the PCs fearfully:



"Are you the spirits that Jacob Marley foretold?"

And so on. He'll go on about roasting the poor in their own pudding, housing the homeless in prisons and hanging poor sentimental saps up by their own ribbons and wreaths. Typical Scrooge-style bah-hum-bugging.

He doesn't sound at *all* like Santa Claus. Not a single ho-ho. His voice is Scrooge's voice, with Scrooge's accent. He seems to be ... Ebenezer Scrooge. Who just happens to look all Santa-fied.

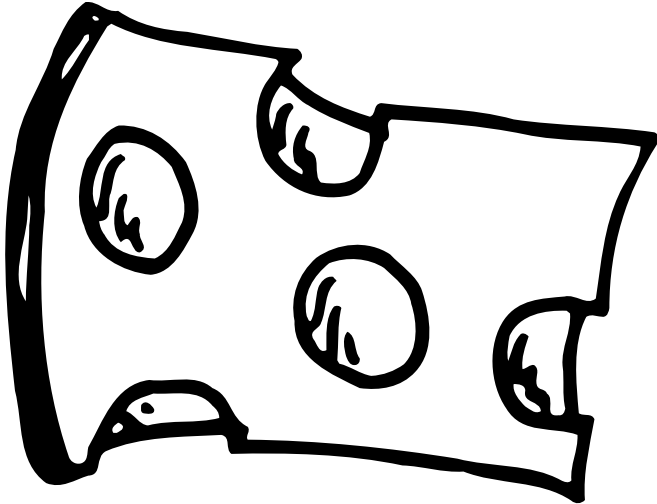
If the PCs attack him anyway, he won't fight back. The old man will just lie there and allow himself to be attacked, pleading for mercy. "Please, spirits! I will accept these visitations for old Marley's sake! Do not harm me!"

What's Going On?

It's about time to bring you up to speed what's happening. You *are* the Game Master, after all (and if you *aren't* the Game Master, I won't snitch, you naughty cheater you). The PCs will discover most or all of this stuff eventually, but it's complicated enough that you should be clear on all of it in advance:

- Ebenezer Scrooge is, in fact, Avaricious Santa Claus. He's playing the part of Scrooge with the PCs for one reason only – *he hasn't the slightest idea what the hell is going on*. In that, he and the PCs have something in common.
- The British Isles are the home of yet another facet of Christmas. In this case, it is the various pagan celebrations of the Winter Solstice as celebrated by the Celts and Picts and so on during Roman times. History tells us that the Romans let the pagans keep their holidays; they just Christianized them. That's the main reason Christmas happens when it does, in the wintertime.
- Historians don't realize that there was a single, unifying religion underlying all the antler-heads and Yule logs and stuff. This forgotten, dark faith was a cult dedicated to ancient evil from beyond the stars – the extracosmic horror known as Dread Cthistmas (*Kuh-THISST-muss*). Cthistmas is a great, bloated red creature, shaped like a giant green humanoid with a great "beard" of coiling writhing tentacles. Unlike the rest of his body, the tentacles are a sickly, pale white, as if they've never been exposed to sunlight. He sends his dreams to infect humanity, and humanity dreams of dancing sugarplums as a result.

So you can see, then, why Envious Santa wants this joker out of the picture. If anyone goes and finds out that Santa's look is somehow *derivative* of this tentacular proto-Santa, Envy's plans for Christmas domination are severely wounded (along with his ego). Envy dispatched Angry Santa to scope out the



problem, and Angry discovered that the Cthistmas cult reached a peak in the 19th century, laired on an island in a remote lake in Wales called Loch Noël. This was Envy's very first mission assigned to one of his subordinate Santas.

Something went wrong. Cthistmas is a being of great rage and destructive power, and Angry Santa *liked* him. Anger fell in love with the basic, simple Cthistmas goal of sleeping for a bit, waking up, and tearing the world to pieces. It appealed to his sense of being righteously pissed off at everybody and everything. Angry Santa liked Cthistmas so much he *converted*, turning his back angrily on Envy's plans and dedicating himself to the Cthistmas cult.

Envy, realizing that he had made a poor choice in sending Anger to deal with Cthistmas, dispatched Avarice immediately, and vowed that he'd send the Santas out in *pairs* from then on.

Avarice, having a sense of humor, remembered the story of Ebenezer Scrooge, and found that he was, in fact, a real person, with Bob Cratchit and humbug and the whole thing. Delighted with this, Avarice hogtied Scrooge, tossed him in an alleyway, cast a spell on Bob Cratchit to fog his memory of what he was supposed to look like, and set up his base of operations.

The high priest of the London Chapter of the Dread Cthistmas Cult is none other than Timothy "Tiny Tim" Cratchit. Tiny Tim is physically weak and unable to walk without crutches ... but he's not lame because of poverty and poor medical attention. He's lame because he's bargained with his health for more evil magic power. Tim is a powerful sorcerer, dedicated to the awakening of Dread Cthistmas and the

destruction of all human life. The elder Cratchits are unaware of this, and Avaricious Santa is *unsure* of it, although he has his suspicions.

Then, the PCs arrived. Both Angry Santa (currently holed up in Wales) and Tiny Tim immediately notice the ripple in the local fabric of magic. Quickly improvising, Tiny Tim summoned up the muddle-brained ghost of Jacob Marley in order to delay the PCs a little – and to delay "Scrooge" at the same time. Tim is a busy boy and doesn't want people meddling with him, and he thinks that, with a little luck, the PCs and "Scrooge" might even kill each other off, leaving he and the Dread Cthistmas cult to destroy the world.

The good news is that his plan will backfire, if the PCs are on their toes.

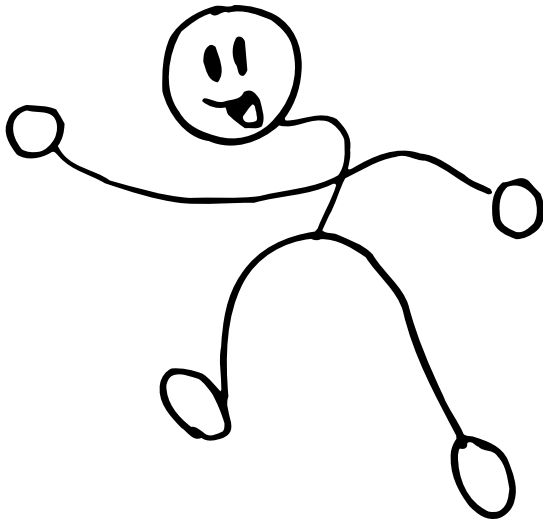
Here We Are As In Olden Days

So here we have the PCs and Scrooge, with Scrooge playing along with the gag until he can learn more about who the PCs are and where they stand in relation to his mission. Eventually, somebody should take a bite of cheese.

First Bite: Christmas Past

When a PC raises the cheese to bite it, Avaricious Santa will immediately recognize it, and his eyes will grow wide with terror. "Nooooooooo!" he'll shout in slow motion, as the PC's teeth rip through the cheese in slightly *less* slow motion. The PCs won't notice that Scrooge is objecting until they've already tasted the magic cheese. The cheese summons Groovy Boxed Text:

All of you, along with Ebenezer in his night-shirt, appear in the midst of a noisy party in what seems to be a warehouse. A large, mustachioed man dances drunkenly on a chair, and a dozen or more of his young employees caper around him merrily. In a dark corner of the room, a thin, sullen young man sits talking with a very pretty girl. Ebenezer looks to you, sighs, and waits.



Everyone thought kindly of old Fezziwig, and never had the heart to tell him he danced like a palsied Dervish with a badger biting his gonads.

This is the chief “Christmas Past” scene from *A Christmas Carol*, more or less. The place is Fezziwig’s Warehouse, where Scrooge worked as a young man. The skinny guy is young Scrooge, and the pretty girl is Isabel (or just “Belle”), his girlfriend. There’s a Christmas party going on in the background, and Fezziwig and his wife are dancing up a storm. Those PCs that have seen the movie(s), read the book, seen the plays, heard the radio dramas and so on should know this scene well – it’s where Isabel *dumps* young Scrooge. If the PCs are sharp enough to recognize what’s happening, they should lead Ebenezer over to watch his younger self being dumped. Isabel will go on about how Scrooge cares for nothing but money and how he used to be such a nice guy and a good kisser and all.

The PCs might also notice that young Ebenezer really is quite thin.

Scrooge-Santa, through all of this, will try hard to keep up the Scrooge act, saying things like. “No, spirits! Torment me no longer with this bitter memory! I cannot bear it! Have I not seen enough?” and so on. He also tries to suck in his gut to convince the PCs that he’s Scrooge. Cruel Game Masters can have a good time by having “Scrooge” correcting the PCs on details of “his” past. Santa Claus, after all, knows every Christmas story back-to-front, and he’s starting to suspect the truth – that he (fake Scrooge) is being tormented by fake ghosts. He’ll hold out, however, for the next scene.

Second Bite: Christmas Present

After the dumping scene has occurred, the cheese will work again. Scrooge-Santa watches carefully and nervously as the PCs again bite the cheese, releasing more Groovy Boxed Text from deep within it:

The scene shifts to a dark London street, with snow falling in slow, artificial flurries. A tiny, run-down house stands in front of you, and light shines from the windows. This is the house of Bob Cratchit and his family.

Again, the PCs should know the drill: Scrooge is supposed to look in the windows. He’s supposed to see the Cratchits joyously and gratefully sharing a turkey the size of a used pencil-eraser. Then, he’s supposed to want to go inside, to hear them speaking, where he’ll hear poor Bob Cratchit raising a toast to Scrooge as “the founder of the feast” despite his boss’ cruelty. As if that isn’t gut-wrenching enough, it should also be revealed that young Tiny Tim, though sick and due to die if daddy doesn’t get a raise, is as happy and grateful as any of them.

But it doesn’t happen that way, this time. Not exactly, anyway.

Scrooge (with or without prompting from the PCs) looks in the window, sees the scene, and wants to go inside. Let the PCs start their scolding speech about his wicked ways and how the Cratchits enjoy Christmas despite their lack of wealth, if they remember to make one.

Point out, at some point, that Scrooge has just wandered off upstairs somewhere.

The PCs are free to explore the house. They’re ghosts here, though, and can’t physically interact with anything or make themselves heard. They’ll find Scrooge chuckling to himself in Tiny Tim’s tiny bedroom. Scrooge’s eyes are fixed on a large book lying open on a stack of others. He’ll turn to the PCs and smile.

“Oh, ho-ho-HO!” he shouts! “That fool! I’ve suspected that lame little snot for a while now, and *this* proves it!” he points at the book. “Check that action out, spirits.”

The book is a Weirdass Evil Magic Book (3) and immediately attacks the mind of the first character who takes a peek. Strange, contorted images of vacuum cleaners, sardine cans, and duty-free ironing boards swim and form menacing Christmas gift packages! Red boxes of cheese wheels and summer sausages collide with wreaths and cologne samples in such a way that makes ordinary geometry and logic jump out of your left ear and order a pizza! And that's just the *pictures*, man!

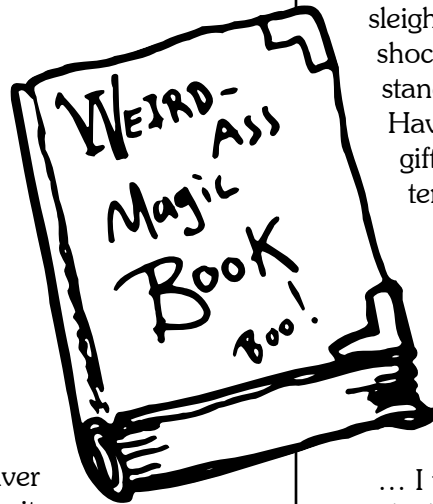
If the book wins, the PC is reduced to dribbling inanely and poking at his own forehead for a while. If the PC wins, the other PCs can look at the book safely – but still not learn much from the bizarre thing.

Santa pulls an enormous revolver from under his nightcoat and levels it at the PCs. “I know you work for Tiny Tim. Who are you? What’s your connection to all this?”

There’s no telling what the PCs might do, so let’s just go over the particulars of what’s going on:

- Avaricious Santa, as we’ve noted before, is here trying to find Angry Santa (who’s gone rogue) and the Dread Cthistmas Cult. He’s been eyeing Tiny Tim as a link to both of them, and he’s right.
- The book clinches it, and he’s laughing because he thinks that Tiny Tim made an error in letting him see it.
- Little does Santa realize that the book was placed there by Cumberland Games & Diversions to provide a cheap plot hook. NPCs are like putty in our hands.
- Santa doesn’t know who the PCs really are, doesn’t know what they’re up to and doesn’t know about anything that’s happened in New York. He’s been busy here in London.

The goal should be a semi-reasonable exchange of facts. Whether it happens before, after, or during a fight scene isn’t that important, but Avarice is willing to tell much of what *he* knows if the PCs are willing to do the same.



If the PCs tell him about Jacob Marley’s request, he’ll realize that they’re dupes of Tiny Tim, not his agents. He’ll happily *ally* with them against Tiny Tim, since at that point he’ll recognize them as adventurer-types from beyond time and space.

If the PCs tell him about the reindeer and the sleigh and wanting to assassinate him, he’ll be shocked. “I’m shocked,” he’ll say. “Am I to understand that you want to *kill* me? Kill *Santa Claus*? Have you not profited from my duty-free annual gift deliveries?” (He’s Avarice; he thinks in those terms)

Aim for peace. No matter *what* Avarice learns, he doesn’t want to fight the PCs ... not here and now, anyway. He’ll propose the following in a deep, jolly Santa Claus tone:

“I’ll tell you what. Right now, thanks to that magic cheese (*ho-ho*), we are trapped in a pocket dimension created by Tiny Tim ... I therefore propose that we seek peace together, until which time we can escape and rid the world of the rogue Angry Santa. We both want him fragged, albeit for different reasons ... and I know a *lot* more about him than you do. Am I right? *Ho, ho, ho!* Of course I’m right! And I know that good little boys and girls can tell a *good deal* when they see one!

The PCs are likely to ask what happens *after* that, once Angry Santa has been dealt with. Avarice will reply “Well, that’s a problem we can table for a later discussion. I want Cthistmas destroyed to please Envious Santa ... you want Cthistmas preserved to maintain the state of Christmas as it is. You want me dead ... I, understandably, prefer to live. We have only *two* disagreements, then, and I think we’re all adult enough to handle them when the time comes. But that time isn’t now, ho-ho.”

THE SHINY NOSE

1 oz. cherry liqueur
1 oz. Grenadine
1 oz. cinnamon schnapps



Antonio’s personal favorite “candy drink” at the holidays, and ideal for relaxing in pocket dimensions. He recommends this to any undecided customer for exactly that reason. Shake with ice and serve straight up. Garnish with a chewy “cinnamon bear” impaled cruelly on a toothpick.

The characters *are* trapped in a phantasm. If they run through the “streets of London” that seem to be outside the house, they’ll run and run and end up back where they started. Kind of like Carl Sagan’s “two-dimensional doofus on a sphere” analogy for the four-dimensional shape of the cosmos. Or one of those tesseract thingies. The only way out of the Cratchits’ home is (you guessed it!) to eat the last of the cheese. Santa remarks, disgustedly “it’ll summon more boxed text. I hate that stuff.”

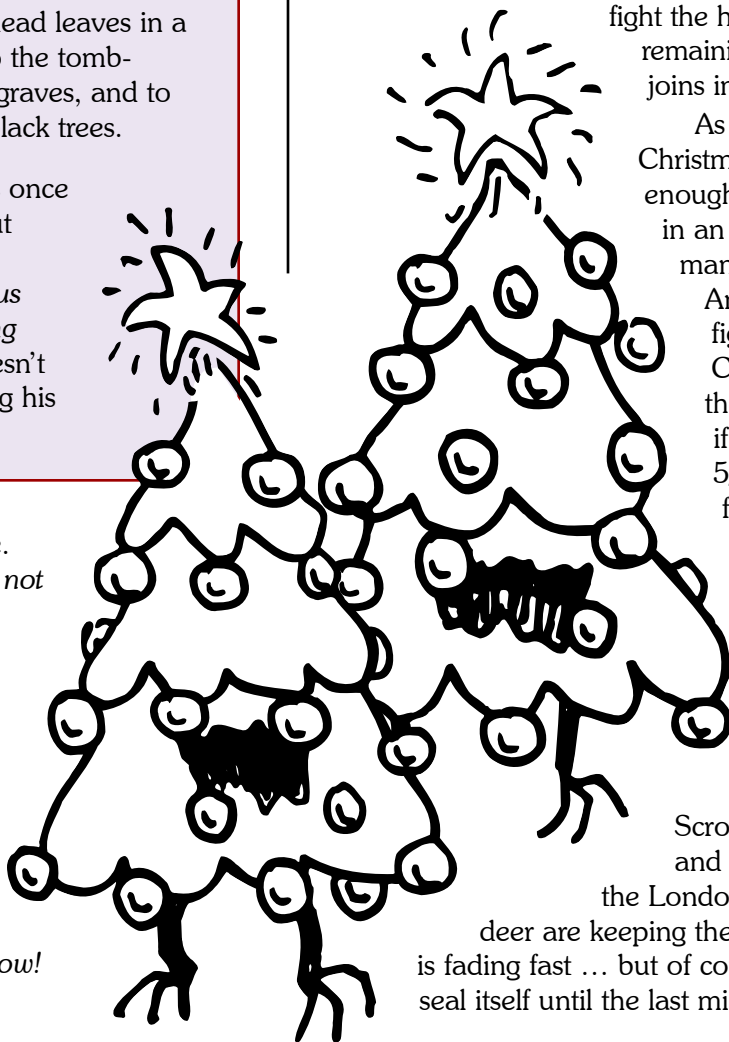
Third Time's the Charm: Christmas Future

The Groovy Boxed Text appears when someone eats the last bit of cheese:

There is a cold swirling of snow and sparkling light, fading to thick, gloomy darkness. You are in a graveyard, standing amid dead leaves in a terrible chill. An icy fog clings to the tombstones, and to nearby yawning graves, and to the madly twisted branches of black trees.

The tombstone nearest you was once engraved *Ebenezer Scrooge*, but that’s been clawed to ruin, and replaced with a jagged *Avaricious Santa Claus and Some Meddling Idiots*. Santa looks around “Doesn’t look good,” he says, brandishing his revolver defensively.

Out of the fog, shapes shamble. *Ten* shapes. Christmas trees ... but *not* Christmas trees. Avarice recognizes them immediately, and grimly names them: the Dark Spawn of Shub-Tannenbaum. They advance, their hundreds of eyes twinkling colorfully in the dark, their “star organ” shining grimly in the mist, their horrible silver acid bulbs reflecting their deadly purpose. AAAAAGHH! Before it’s too late! *Read their stats right now!*



DARK SPAWN OF SHUB-TANNENBAUM

Description: Hideous slimy creatures in the shape of fleshy Christmas trees, these conical entities have hundreds of glittering multicolored eyes, glowing stars at the tops of their bodies and shiny silver globs hanging off the green folds of their flesh. The spawn attack with a flurry of boughs, each dripping with deadly Space Acid. They can also lob the silver, acid-filled globs a reasonable distance. Many weapons goop right through them, so they’re very dangerous, especially in large numbers.

Clichés: Hideously Fleshy and Festive Monster (3) and/or Grunt Squad (ranging from 6 to 10 dice).

Scary little buggers, aren’t they? This particular clump is a very dangerous Grunt Squad (8). Santa will raise his revolver to fight, but he struggles with himself re the cost: profit ratio of using the bullets at this juncture. For the first round, the PCs will fight the horrors alone. For all remaining rounds, Santa joins in.

As if the horrid, fleshy Christmas trees weren’t enough, the PCs are fighting in an old graveyard, with many of its own hazards.

Any time during the fight that a PC or Santa Claus rolls a pair in their dice (for example, if three dice come up 5/5/2, that’s a pair of fives), consult the

Graveyard Combat Trouble table (next page) to see what happens to that character.

After the fight, the PCs will notice that the “Ebenezer Scrooge” grave is open, and it forms a *gateway* to the London park where the reindeer are keeping the sleigh. The gateway is fading fast ... but of course, it won’t actually seal itself until the last minute.

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, it’s 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

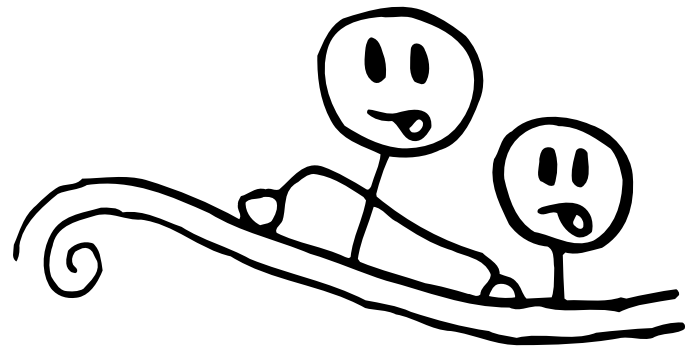
The gateway deposits everyone roughly onto the ground back in London. As the PCs wearily stand to brush themselves off, they hear a yelp from Avarice and the sound of several automatic weapons clicking and clattering into potentially violent positions. Dasher and the others have *immediately* tackled 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.

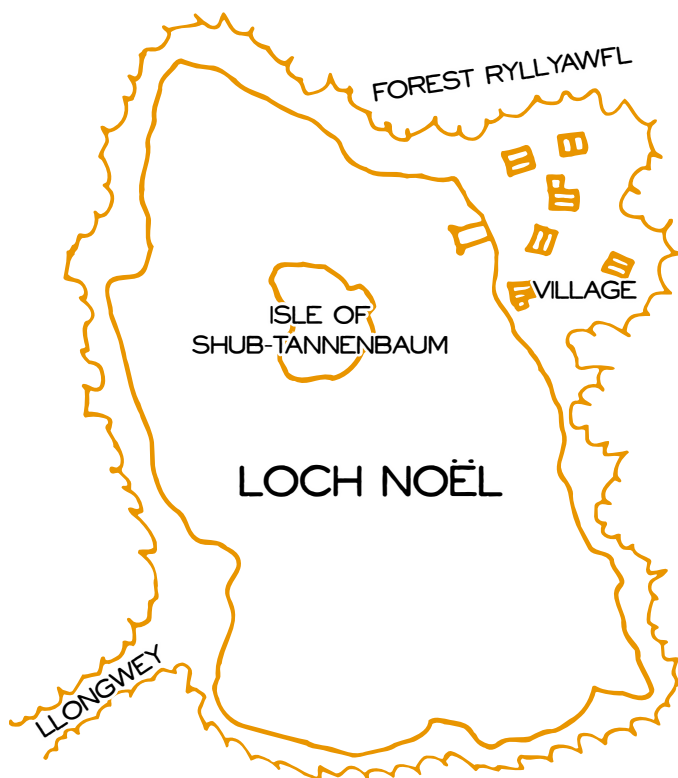
Fortunately, Santa Claus knows the way – this is another good reason to hold off on killing him. He can guide the sleigh expertly if the PCs let him, covering the 160 odd miles between London and Loch Noël in just under 40 minutes. The PCs will probably insist on keeping a gun at his head for the whole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

complain much. Before the end of this paragraph, the PCs are coming in low over the hills of Llawfflewphydriaafflodd.

Santa brings the sleigh down toward the woods just north of Loch Noël village, and there's trouble immediately. Everyone must beat a Difficulty 10 with their most athletic cliché, or *fall out* of the sleigh as it suddenly dips violently toward the ground – the sleigh *doesn't work over the Loch*. Santa pulls up in time and clears dry land for a rough landing in the snow. Any PC who falls, falls right into the icy waters (this could be bad). This serves to establish that the lake is dangerously magical, and that the PCs will need to find another way across the dark water.

Loch Noël Map Key

The Forest Ryllyawfl: These deep woods are dangerous. While the landscape is rocky hills with many small streams, rifts, and sudden drops, much is concealed by the two-foot plus snowfall (and more snow is, of course, coming down even now). More to the point, the woods are full of wandering Dark Spawn of Shub-Tannenbaum, blinking their colorful



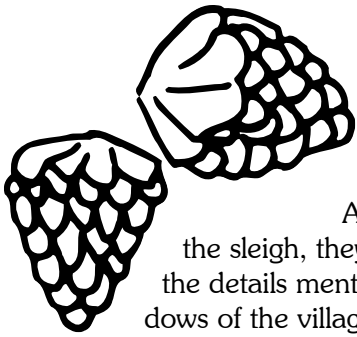
eyes and celebrating the rise of Dread Cthistmas! For every ten minutes of real-time that the PCs annoy you by wandering into the woods for no real reason, roll 1d6. That's how high you should count before tossing a few Dark Spawn at them, if you think they'd enjoy another tussle. If you want, you can even use the graveyard table again, substituting "unseen rift under the snow" for "grave." The zombies are still there, of course. If you think more Dark Spawn would just be a tedious sidetrack, keep them as a distant, visible menace in the darkness, and allow the PCs to sneak past them with some easy rolls.

The Llongwey Road: Anyone following this road for about 50 miles to the southwest will eventually hit the Carmarthen Bay at the town of Llanelly. Anyone following this road for about 50 miles is also a certified loon, 'cause it isn't very interesting and doesn't have anything to do with Angry Santa.

Loch Noël Village: Less a village than a single wooden pier and half-dozen lonely houses, nobody would notice if the village were wiped from the map. Most maps don't include it to begin with. The villagers are quiet folk who raise pigs and cut wood and fish in the lake and do all that sort of thing. The animals are very skittish tonight, if the PCs break into a barn to check. One thing that the PCs WILL notice, without fail, is that every house is heavily decorated for the holiday, and the glittering lights of a Christmas tree can be seen in each house's window. The villagers don't do this to celebrate – the do it to placate the evil spirits of the forest and the lake, for truly the "spirit of Christmas" dwells here – the spirit of Cthistmas!

Loch Noël: The lake itself, named by a lost Scottish explorer, Conall MacMuirDonagall, is a still, deep, and icy-cold lake. The fish that the villagers draw from it have large, bulbous eyes and blue skin, and the water itself is never clear. The spirit of Cthistmas stirs restlessly tonight, for its power will reach its peak at midnight! At the village dock, a single mid-sized fishing boat (just large enough for the PCs and Avaricious Santa) bobs gently on the black water. The Reindeer can sort of halfway fly over the lake, but it's treacherous and they'd rather not mess with it.

The Isle of Shub-Tannenbaum: From the shores of the lake, the PCs can just make out an island. This is where all the big stuff is happening, and we'll cover it in a minute.



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.

Clichés: 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 is 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.



The count of foes is enormous, but only Angry Santa and Tiny Tim stand out as individuals. The remaining mass of cultists and Spawn are a single Grunt Squad (10).

...Unless it occurs to the PCs to unscrew/shoot/kick one of the giant light bulbs. Naturally, taking out a single bulb makes the whole circle flicker into darkness! This will cause chaos, and reduce the Grunt Squad to half-dice, instantly.

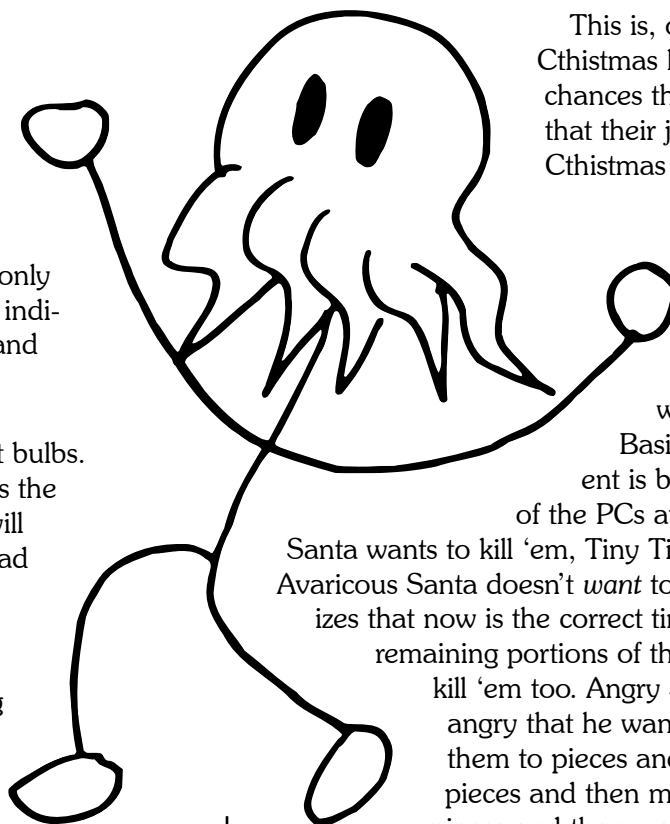
The bulbs *are* a bit warm to the touch, though. Careful. The Cratchits aren't part of the fight; they're just going "Mmph! Mmmph!" until somebody unties and/or ungags them.

As soon as *either of the Santas* gets close to being defeated, something interrupts the fight. Specifically, some Groovy Boxed Text interrupts the fight:

A deep crack and rumble can be heard within the guts of the island, the trembling trees scatter a fresh blizzard into the air, and the altar cracks in two and falls into a steaming rift!

If the Cratchits were still on the altar ... oopsie. Scream, echo, scream, echo, crunch, gulp. Either way:

Out of the crevice rises a bloated red creature, a terrifying figure a hundred feet tall. It stands like a large man, with a great writhing beard of white tentacles. A great and terrible laugh rings out, a mighty **HoOoO! ... HoOoO! ... HoOoO!**, and the dread alien god looks down upon the island, and at you. It is clear from the look in his non-Euclidean eyes that he is pissed. He points at the snow-angels, disrupted by the recent battle. "The Angels!" he shouts, his voice flattening trees. "The Angels are **ALL WRONG!**"



This is, of course, Dread Cthistmas himself. What are the chances that the PCs remember that their job is to *rescue* Dread Cthistmas from Avaricious

Santa? Yes, it's all very cruel. As you can imagine, Dread Cthistmas isn't grateful, doesn't care, and wants to eat them.

Basically, everyone present is bent on the destruction of the PCs at this stage ... Angry Santa wants to kill 'em, Tiny Tim wants to kill 'em, Avaricious Santa doesn't *want* to kill 'em but he realizes that now is the correct time to do so, and any remaining portions of the cult-mob want to kill 'em too. Angry Santa is actually so angry that he wants to kill 'em *and* tear them to pieces and then stomp on the pieces and then maybe spit on the pieces and then maybe yell at the pieces.

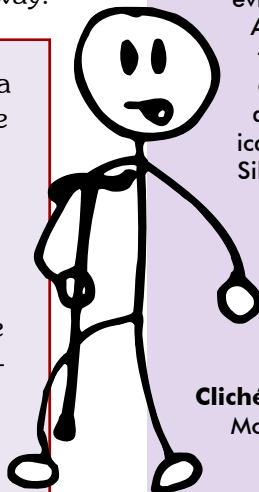
There's good news, though. The magic of the lake is all drawn to this spot. The Reindeer can fly over the lake safely now, and they're realizing that.

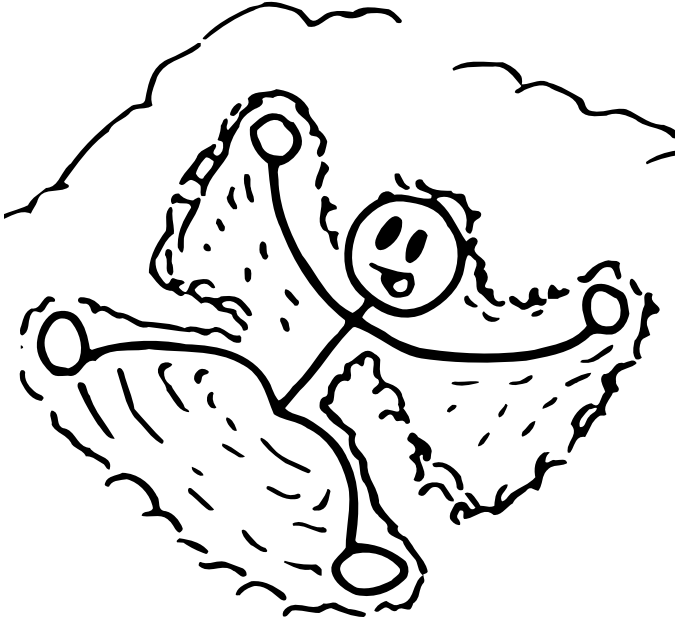
There's other good news. At the last minute, if the PCs *need* it, Avaricious Santa will sacrifice his own life to save them, because they actually succeeded in

DREAD CTHISTMAS

Description: Dread Cthistmas is an ancient cosmic evil, an alien entity from the vicinity of Aldeberan, waiting in a bored sleep at the bottom of Loch Noël for his destined time of earthly rule. He invades man's subconscious in dreams, particularly those of a sensitive or delicate nature, whispering the sounds of alien Silver Bells and the smells of bleak, unearthly eggnog into their brains. His image, that of a great bloated humanoid with a "beard" of tentacles, provides the basis for the modern "Coca-Cola" Santa Claus. He burps a lot and turns those he doesn't like into snails. "Mpadhwglui Noël! Shub-tannenbaum!"

Clichés: Elder Dark Sorcerer (6), Big Whoppin' Monster (6), Sh'nath Clough Gwyrth'lesh (3)





*Little-known trivia among mathematicians:
Euclid hated doing this.*

performing the mission of the Three Ghosts of Christmas: they've demonstrated to their "Ebenezer Scrooge" that greed isn't good.

So, between the reindeer cavalry and the wild card "Scrooge," the PCs can probably pull out of this alive. Any PCs defeated in mid-fight will be tossed onto the snow to be eaten in just a moment ... So as long as at least one of the PCs emerges alive, all of them will.

But don't let them know all that. Keep it scary.

TINY TIM

Description: Tiny Tim, the pathetic sympathy-sucker from the pages of Dickens' classic *A Christmas Carol*, limping sadly and yet still full of love for his family and all the world, is a far, far cry from the Tiny Tim that actually existed.

Much like Dickens' representation of him, Tiny Tim is a very small boy in ill health, forced to use a wooden crutch to move about. This condition, however, is not the result of a frail constitution and an inadequate diet. Like many other evil wizards, his physical infirmity is the result of deals with demonic alien beings, exchanging his life-force for greater magic power – and he got it.

Clichés: Pitiful Waif (3), Eldritch Sorcerer (6), Ukulele Player (1), Charismatic Cult Leader (3)

In Fields Where They Lay

Avaricious Santa, in the aftermath of the final combat scene, will lie dying on a snowy rock. Earthquakes and explosions are destroying the island. Dread Cthistmas, once defeated, becomes a cloying red mist and sinks back into the depths of the Earth where he belongs. As the lake begins to boil, the nearby villagers emerge to collect the resultant teams of floating fish.

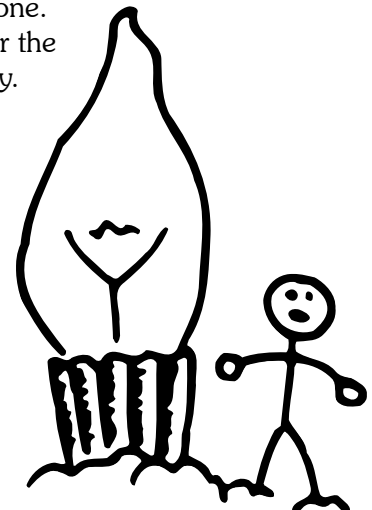
Avaricious Santa beckons to one of the PCs, and whispers his final, dying Groovy Boxed Text:

"I see now that my evil ways were wrong. I promise now to keep Christmas all the year round. Or at least for the next fourteen seconds until I expire. If only I could somehow manage a proper apology! Perhaps I could give you all a new space cruiser for Christmas, or some ultimate weapons, or irresistible sex appeal ... no ... no, none of those would be good enough."

Insert sound of PCs protesting: "No! Really! That would be okay!"

"Wait! (choke) Ho! Ho! (Gasp!) Ho! I can thank you! I can *help* you! The great coup – you must stop it! You must travel to ... Jerusalem! The first (cough) Noël ! The ... first ... Noël ..."

And then he's gone. The Reindeer yell for the PCs to grab the body. They've got a sleigh to catch.



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.

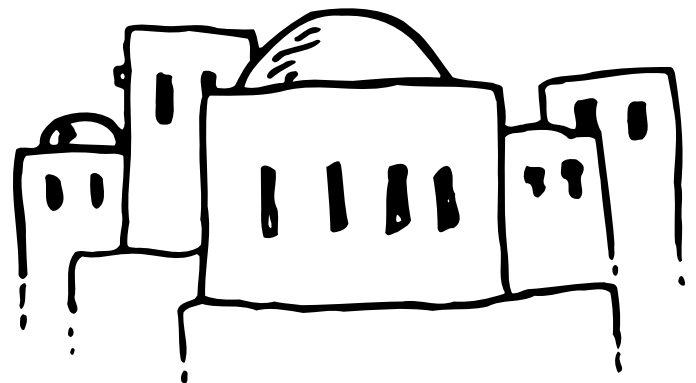
ering presents, the snow is melted and forming a cloud somewhere over Athens. The reindeer lack that much skill with Christmas Magic.

“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



two clear goals: to find and protect Mary and Joseph and the kid – when the kid shows up, that is – and to find and neutralize the efforts of Lazy and Stuck-Up Santa.

It may also occur to them that Lazy Santa probably won't be the most difficult part of the job. They'd be right about that.

Dasher flies the sleigh in, bells-a-ringing, onto the Mount of Olives, just to the east of the city. Over the deep Kidron Valley, the PCs can make out the east wall of the town, and the long stairway leading up to the Ashpot Gate. Lay a heavy sense of the relative holiness of the place on them. The illusion will be shattered in just a second.

Hero Worship

As the PCs recover from the rough landing (the terrain is rocky under the snow, and they've half-crashed into an olive grove), they notice an odd little man dancing gleefully toward the sleigh. Read the following Groovy Boxed Text:

About 10 yards from the sleigh, dancing strangely and making “whoop! whoop!” noises, is a very odd little man. He's dressed in local garb – a single linen body-shirt and sandals. He eagerly dances toward the sleigh, and throws himself face down onto the ground before all of you. You make out an audible *Crack!* as his face hits the rock.

“Oh, strange visitors from the sky! You have delivered unto me snow in the springtime, and now do arrive in the guise of foreigners in a chariot drawn by strange beasts! Have mercy upon me! Please, are you devils? Are you angels? Are you sent unto us as prophets? Have mercy, please!”

The man's name is Rath Bel-Gilrath, a simple carpenter from Jerusalem. When the snow started falling two hours ago (it precedes the sleigh by two hours so the sleigh has something to land on), he saw that it was a miracle and ran out to the Mount of Olives.

“That poor guy,” says Dasher, “is scared fewmetless.”

GAMING IS EDUCATIONAL!

Contrary to the playful reports of historians and linguists eager for a laugh at our expense, languages like Aramaic and Hebrew (let alone Greek, Coptic, etc) weren't commonly spoken or written in biblical times. The Jerusalem locals all speak English, but with lots of “thee” and “thine” and “didst thou” and “yea, verily” thrown in as regional slang. The Romans speak English, too, but with vaguely British accents and without the amusing local slang.

Rath, having never encountered a reindeer, let alone a talking reindeer, swoons and falls to the ground. He's conscious but stunned.

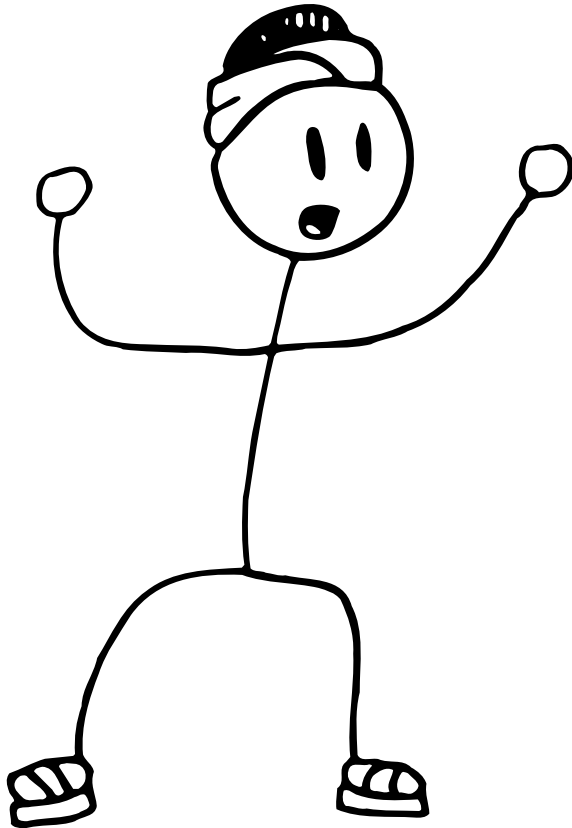
Rath is an ordinary man with Nervous But Highly Spiritual Carpenter (3). If the PCs are *really* cruel, they could probably manipulate the poor sap into thinking just about anything. Once he calms down, Rath will be happy to tell them a little about the city and other everyday matters, if asked, but he'll be startled that such obviously celestial beings aren't omniscient.

He'll also speak of recent strange events, of which the PCs are only the most recent. “First,” he'll say, “we hath seen that big, weird (yea, verily) star in the sky, and then those strangers at the temple, and now this! A visitation!”

The PCs should immediately realize that the “star” Rath refers to must be the “star of Bethlehem” that helped guide kings and wise men to the birth of Christ. Owing to the cloud-cover produced by the sleigh to make it snow, it isn't currently visible, but there is a spot in the clouds where a persistent light creates a noticeable glow.

The PCs might be curious about the “strangers at the temple.” For that, Rath has a tale too tell:

It did come to pass early this afternoon, that I and my wife, Adra, and my sons, Mithshak and Rolah, sons of Rath of Jerusalem, son of Abraeth, son of Mohtor the extremely wise, son of Berah, son of Jake, son of Giddy-Lath-Rolah, son of Erioch, son of Zarapeth, son of Abinidab, son of the four brothers of Leth-Bazuel, son of Abijah, son of Dreses and Guna, son of ...



If you think he rambles on now, ask him about his 17th level Fighter sometime!

He'll continue that portion of the story until the PCs make him stop. Once they knock his needle back into the groove, he'll apologize and continue:

It did come to pass early this afternoon, that I and my family did verily go unto the Gentiles Court of the Temple of King Herod, journeying as we were to the north of the city to buyest lumber for my craft. And there we did see five strangers, men with clothes fashioned seemingly of finest silver, and their heads were in a halo, and they seemeth like angels! And the angels did speak to the crowd in strange tongues, saying unto them "Hi! Where's Christ at?" but we knew not of Christ, and the angels, changing their appearances to that of common men, walked into the city and I seeth them no further!

Then he'll start doing the "mercy, have mercy" business all over again.

Entering The City

It's a long walk down the hill and then up it again to the Ashpot Gate at the southeast corner of the city (follow along on the map). When they climb the long flights of stone steps, they find a simple archway and tower set into the fairly short stone walls. Beyond it, the City of David (the "lower city") stretches out, and the streets climb a hill to the north and west, leading to the Upper City. In the distance, they can see the walls surrounding the Temple of King Herod.

At the gate, a single Roman guard greets the PCs, and a small souvenir stand sells clay ashtrays and pecan rolls. The centurion will eye the PCs suspiciously – especially their bizarre clothing.

"Listen, you lot," he'll say. "I don't care what you dress like in private; I've seen it all back home, I *promise* you. But we've got to keep some order on the streets. I've seen too much today that's weird, and I can't cope with *you* right now. See those torches?" he points to a large sign proclaiming *Heribab's: We've Got a Smock Just For You*, then glares at them "go dress yourselves properly and there won't be any trouble. There's a good lad."

Fortunately, the shop is open late into the evening.

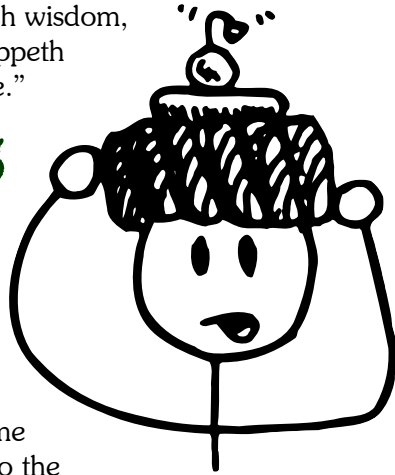
Heribab's Smocks And Shrouds

A small and convenient plot devices located near the Pool of Siloam at the Ashpot Gate. Heribab can sell the PCs some local duds, but it'll cost everyone 30 shekels each. What's that? They have no shekels? Heribab enjoys bartering, too (plus, see the sidebar if the PCs become obsessed with obtaining shekels). He'll take measurements and toss their old clothes into a fire, humming cheerily and talking biblical the whole time. If the PCs don't think to "talk biblical" themselves, Heribab will look alarmed until they do.

Unfortunately, Heribab has been busy lately and he's fresh out of ordinary linen smocks. All he has in stock is the "oriental astrologer" look, and when the PCs get dressed they'll all look suspiciously like Wise Men from the East. The clothes are very comfortable, though; they're baggy and shiny and can hide all sorts of things.

Heribab doesn't know anything about Rath's tale of the "Angels," and has no useful expertise beyond clothing. If the PCs have a lot of questions, though, he *will* recommend that they seek out a man named Baana, who sells t-shirts on the north side of the Court of Gentiles. "If thou dost seekest news of the temple," Heribab says, "Baana is thine best source for such wisdom, although his T-shirts crappeth mightily, if thy askest me."

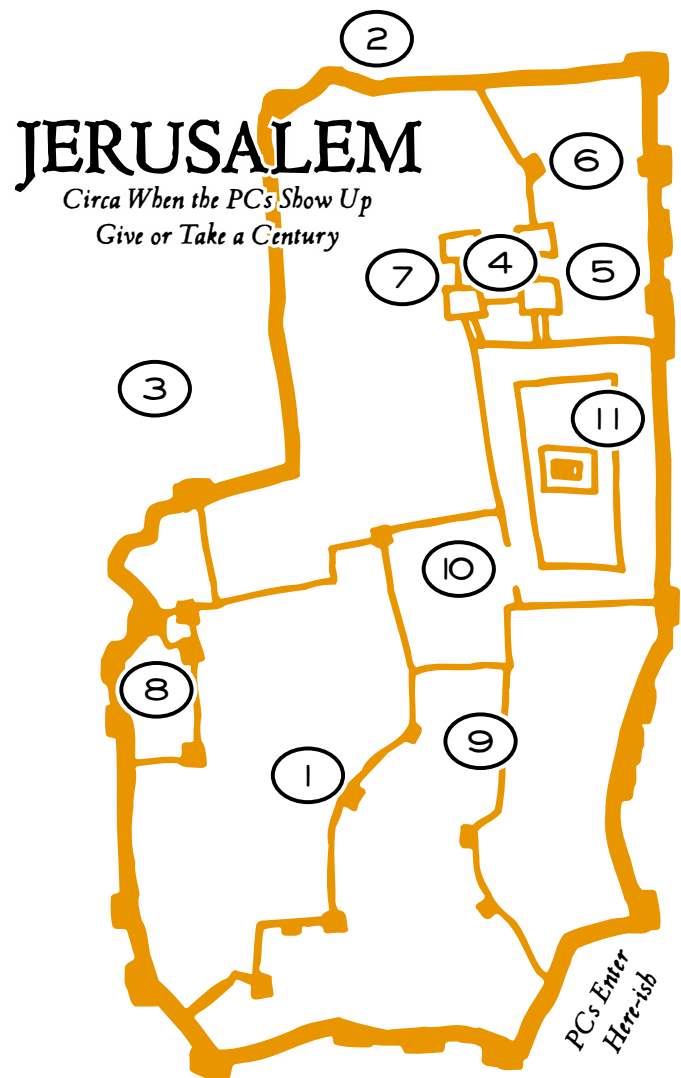
The RISUS Guide to Biblical Jerusalem



Jerusalem sits in some semi-grassy, rocky hills to the west of the River Jordan in the land of Judea. During Christ's lifetime (assuming the PCs do their job and he gets a lifetime), the city will double in size, expanding rapidly out to the north and west. Expansion to the south and east is impossible due to the deep valleys there (like the one that the PCs just crossed). Like any other city, it has cops (both local men and a handful of Roman officers), its hoodlums, and its marketplaces. The streets are crowded, filthy, and bleached by the desert sun.

The ruler of the city is a fat Idumean gentile named King Herod, who, despite historical portrayals, is a really nice guy who just happens to be the King of Judea, Iturea, and Traconitis. He was appointed by the Roman Senate more than 30 years ago, and he's spent most of his life and most of the royal fortune building theatres, a hippodrome, public swimming pools, roller-derby arenas, amusement parks, and so on to make himself look good to the people and give them a sense (a false one) of security, prosperity, and independence from Rome. His greatest expenditure along these lines is the great Temple of King Solomon, a theme-park quality re-creation of the original temple that Solomon had 600 years ago.

Unfortunately for King Herod, he looks almost exactly like Santa Claus. We'll deal with that shortly. Meanwhile, have a look at some of the important points in the city.



Area 1 – The Hippodrome: A big stadium for horse and chariot races. On weekends, it also features occasional gladiator contests for visiting Roman dignitaries. If the PCs get caught doing something *especially* illegal, they might be sent here to fight for their lives. Or they can just show up, watch the races, and lay a few shekels on Dead Sea Biscuit in the fourth.

Area 2 – Northern Markets: These are open stretches of grass and sand in the undeveloped areas north of the city wall. There are small neighborhoods springing up, though, and the markets being edged out, with all the neighborhood bickering that entails. It's currently like a vast flea market, where you can buy lumber, livestock, scratchy old LPs, comic books, and cheap Persian bobblehead dolls of famous Romans.

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.

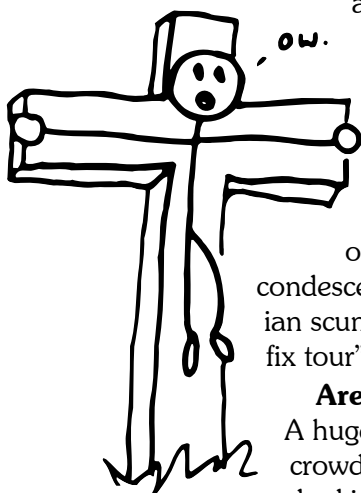
Heribab's fine with barter, and he may even be impressed enough by the look of futuristic coinage to accept some if he can be convinced it contains precious metal. The local currency is mostly in *shekels*, which are worth about a dollar, or *bekahs*, which are half-shekels. Also, since King Herod answers 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!!!

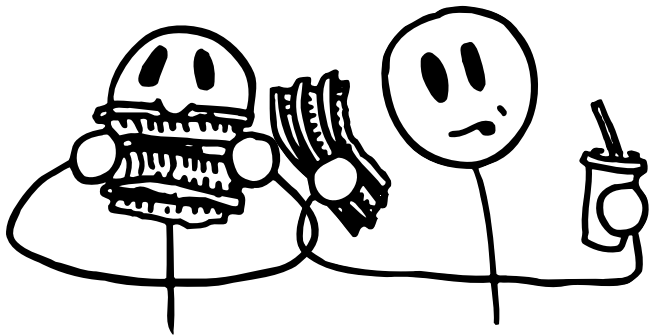
* * * * *

#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.

There's a copy of this sign in the Player Handouts (don't get it confused with the very similar *other* sign the PCs will discover later in this chapter). There's also a less amusing sign describing the catering services. Big Adam is a nice guy, and he'll serve the PCs cheerfully. He will fail to mention that he's the leader of a local cannibal cult unless asked. If the PCs visit and eat some ribs (and they *should*, oh yes they should) they'll be given a promotional "bonus basket" of mixed rib types. Describe them as excellent, as succulent, as memorable.



Some happy Player Characters enjoying a favorite local cuisine. The slaw's good, too.

Area 8 – Herod's Palace and Towers: Just a big old stone structure with lots of guards, a chamber or two, a throne-room sort of deal, and walls around it. Herod used to live here. Santa Claus lives here, now, and one way or another, the PCs should end up here eventually. If the PCs bribe any of the guards (none of whom are Romans), they will find out that the King "hasn't been himself, lately." For other details on this place, see page 50.

Area 9 – Tyropeon Street: The "Main Street" of old Jerusalem, which begins at the Damascus Gate at the city's northwest corner, runs down to the side of the temple complex, goes down a flight of stone steps, and then south through the City of David. It is this southern stretch which is known as the Way of the Cheesemongers.

Area 10 – Xystus: This is a Greek exercise hall – a sort of a yuppie health club for the biblical era. They have a full stock of nautilus-style resistance gear, free weights, a jogging track, and so on.

Area 11 – The Temple: This stands several cubits above street level on "the temple mount," and consists of two main parts. The first is the huge open court, known as the Court of Gentiles. Anybody is

allowed here, and the place is always crowded with both locals and tourists. Since it's much quicker to cut across the huge court than walk *around* it in the city, it's become a kind of open marketplace. The kids hang out here when they aren't scarfing down ribs at Adam's, since it amounts to the local equivalent of a mall. The high walls are nearly completed, and they're already covered in advertising billboards, but are otherwise artfully dolled-up to give the impression of the good old days of King Solomon. Baana the shirt-monger can be found near the north colonnades in the daytime (see below).

The temple itself is less public. On the balustrade surrounding the building are several warnings written in both ordinary and biblical English, forbidding gentiles and out-of-towners from entering the temple on pain of death. It goes on to specify that said pain and said death will be the fault of the offender, and not his executioner. Nothing in the adventure as written happens inside the temple. But just in case: Within the temple, the layers of forbidden areas get stickier. First, you have the Court of Women (the last stop for any gals), then the Court of Men (the last stop for non-holy men), and then the inner parts – the altars and most-holy-chambers and other places where only clergy are permitted. Rumors of a clergy-only all-night buffet persist. And just in case the clever PCs get any strange tactical notions about it, the Ark of the Covenant hasn't been here for more than 600 years. Or so history tells us. The same "history" that doesn't remember that all these people speak English.

Exploring Jerusalem

When last we left our PCs (before the map key muscled in), they had just dressed in "wise men" outfits and (speaking biblical all the way), trotted out the door of Heribab's Smocks and Shrouds. They're walking the Way of Cheesemongers in the City of David. This probably isn't how they pictured their evening when they walked into Antonio's.

There aren't any NPCs leaping out of the plot to accost them just now, so they're free to explore and look into any number of things. Probable courses of action include looking for Rath's "angels," searching for Santa directly, and seeking out Baana the shirt-monger. Let the PCs enjoy the city and interact with the natives; see the sections below to help you improvise encounters based on what they're seeking. The

long-term goal is to get them an audience with King Herod (that's Stuck-Up Santa Claus to you and me), but in the short term, they might get a taste of Adam's Ribs, go for a swim in the Pool of Bethesda, get nailed to a cross, etc.

Good Morning, Angels

If the PCs ask a random passer-by about the "angels" Rath Beth-Gilrath saw in the Court of Gentiles, you can just make stuff up to hedge the PCs where you want to go, or you can roll 1d20 and let it hedge them at random. If you get a repeated result, use the result directly *below* it, and so on (thus ultimately hedging toward the final, more Roman response):

- 1-2** "He that hath knowledge spareth his words and a man of understanding is of an excellent spirit."
- 3-4** "The heart of the wise teacheth his mouth, and addeth learning to his lips."
- 5-6** "The simple believeth every word, but the fool rageth, and is confident."
- 7** What are you – some kind of Wise Man?
- 8** "Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall."
- 9-11** I did see these visions in the Court. But seen them since have I not.
- 12-14** That angels did tread the stones of the Court of Gentiles is news unto me.
- 15-17** I know not; but I doth know that Adam's House of Ribs hath the finest slaw in all Jerusalem. However, avoidest thou the wine, lest ye pass such wind as could blast the walls of the city into ruin.
- 18** "Go from the presence of a foolish man, when thou perceivest not in him the lips of knowledge." (Quite good advice, in context)
- 19-20** Yeah. I was there when they showed up – pretty creepy if you ask me. The last I heard they went up to Herod's Palace to visit the king himself. Dunno.

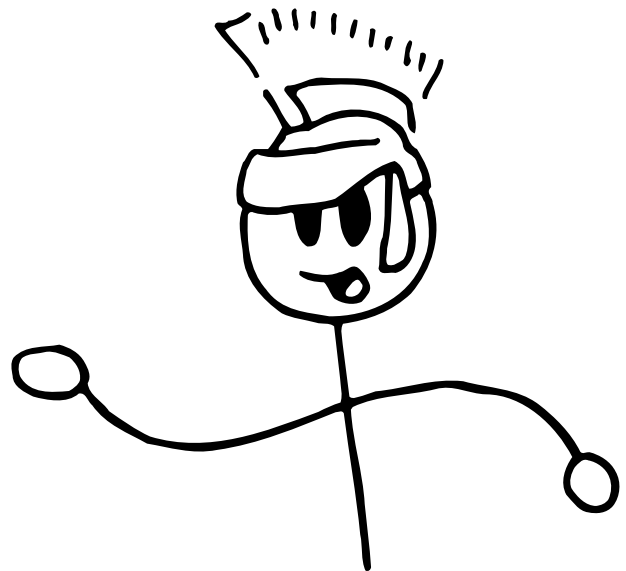
That You, Santy Claus?

If the PCs ask if anybody has seen Santa Claus, by name, they will get one of the more pointless replies from the "angels" table. If they *describe* Santa Claus, someone will point at a nearby statue of King Herod (they're all over the city). This should provide sufficient hintage.

Gold, Frankincense, and More

Since the PCs are all dolled up as Wise Men, they may decide to shop around for some myrrh and frankincense and stuff and head *directly* to Bethlehem. Because nothing says "happy birthday" like the gift of resin.

It's still a *bit* too early for Bethlehem. If they start asking around for directions, it's time for the agents of Stuck-Up Santa Claus to catch wind of their presence and send some soldiers around to "invite" them to the palace (see *King Herod's Chamber*, page 50). Lazy Santa has also been charged with the duty of placing spies at all known resin dealerships, to pass on any word of unusual traffic in frankincense and myrrh. This means there are no such spies, and that the PCs can buy a ton of frankincense and myrrh (or balm of Gilead, etc.) without anyone taking special notice of it. So much for giving an important job to Lazy Santa.



"Make every meal ... a Roman meal."

Baana The Shirt-Monger

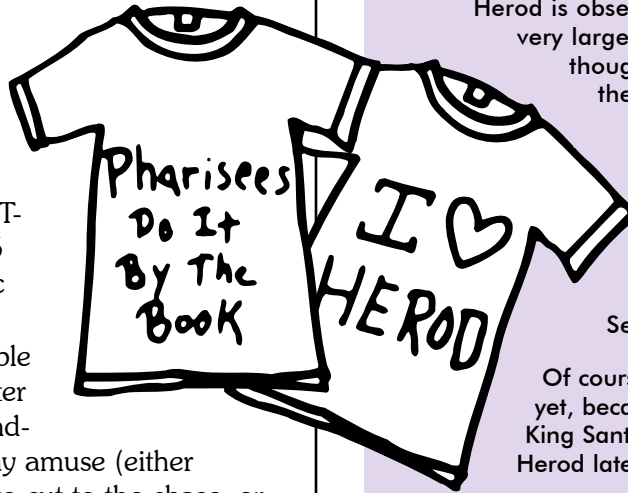
Baana is an old man with a small wooden stall set up amid the northern colonnades of the Court of Gentiles. He has several T-Shirts for sale, at 10 shekels apiece. These shirts include assorted logo designs from local pop culture, and shirts bearing cheeky slogans like “My Grandma Made A Pilgrimage To Jerusalem And All I Got Was This Crummy T-Shirt.” Baana can make custom slogan T-Shirts, too, but it costs an extra 5 shekels for fuzzy and/or prismatic iron-on letters.

Baana is a fountain of valuable information, and the Game Master should use him to hedge the mindless PCs in any direction that may amuse (either directly to the King, if you want to cut to the chase, or to some other part of the city that you’d enjoy showing off). He’s a personal fan of the food at Adam’s House of Ribs, for example, and eagerly recommends it to any tourists, particularly well-dressed oriental magi, which he assumes the PCs must be. He clearly remembers the “angels” incident, and on that he will offer, “That strangers wearing silver garments and halos did walk here is true, and to find such strangers one must find the King, who takes great interest in those who visit from afar. Verily,” he’ll add, “the King wouldst welcome wise ones such as yourselves with feasting and music, unless I miss mine guess.”

Jumping the Gun on Jesus

Tomorrow evening, Jesus Christ will be born, and that’s kind of a big deal, but it’s *not* common knowledge. If the PCs forget that, and ask the locals questions about holy kids, prophecy, or even the plainly visible giant star above the city (the snowstorm has abated, and the star is back), the following will occur:

First, the NPC will shout to two nearby Roman guards, saying “Hearken unto me, guards! These good strangers, as thee can know by their garments, are plainly Wise Men from the East! They have come to us with wisdom and should speakest to the great King!”



KING HEROD THE GREAT

Description: Herod, the King of Judea and *et cetera*, is a nice old guy who just happens to look like Santa Claus. All that business about ordering infants slaughtered was just Matthew’s sour grapes over some parking tickets. Sweet guy, basically.

Herod is obsessed with the construction of very large temples and other structures, though, and he’s a big fat shill for the Romans. On the other hand, he’s very family oriented, with lots of kids of his own, only a few of which he’s had executed. He’s got one step-daughter, in particular, for whom he’d do *anything* if she’d do that cute Dance of the Seven Veils thing she does.

Of course, King Herod doesn’t show up yet, because the King on the throne is King Santa Claus. But we’ll meet the real Herod later on ...

Clichés: Roman Yes-Man (4), King (3), Civil Engineering Enthusiast (2), Barry Gibb (5), Frustrated Cartoonist Creator of “Zippy The Magic Bug” (1)

Second, the Romans will agree, and bow before the PCs. They will request the honor of escorting them safely to the audience chamber of King Herod.

King Herod’s Chamber

As the clever Game Master has no doubt noticed, all paths of inquiry lead (for various reasons) to the palace of King Herod on the west side of town. After a nice, long walk uphill, the PCs stand before the mighty palace, resplendent in whatever palaces tend to be resplendent in. The PCs, whether they arrive escorted by the Roman centurions or not, will be greeted as Wise Men from the East. Their outfits are, after all, a dead giveaway. A dozen palace guards will be summoned to escort them *directly* to the audience chamber of the king!

There is fanfare and celebration. Trumpets sounding, banners fluttering, and attractive, obligatory half-naked women waving and winking, the PCs will arrive in an ever-growing tide of respect and splendor. By the time they are within the building, their retinue will number in the dozens, and every one of them will



have an attractive member of the opposite sex clinging to them. By the time they reach the main hall, they will be accompanied by a proud garrison of guards as well, and four harpists playing delicate melodies. By the time they reach the throne room, there won't be much room left for the King.

But he squeezes in somehow.

Specifically, he squeezes in by having *his* retinue stomp on anyone in his way. This will include one or two of the attractive-members-of-the-opposite-sex that the PCs had just seconds ago.

King Herod, surrounded by courtiers and Roman dignitaries and rather a large collection of his *own* hot babes, moves to a small throne and sits on it. It creaks slightly – he's a heavy dude. He's a heavy dude with a rosy nose and cheeks, twinkling eyes, and a great, white beard. It's a Santa Claus. There's just no doubt about it. He doesn't look like he *wants* there to be doubt. This is a Santa Claus cloaked in, among other

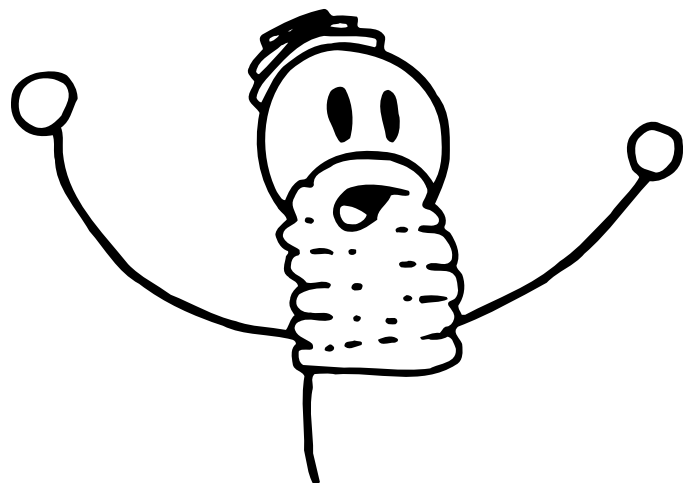
things, an almost radiant air of smug self-appreciation. This is Stuck-Up Santa. Some Groovy Boxed Text appears:

King Herod looks at you warmly, and gives a little trademark “Ho, ho, ho” just to dispel any possible doubts. Then he speaks in Biblical:

“Welcome are thee, that your wisdom has been brought through hardship across the deserts of Judea. We are low before such wise ones, that hath crossed the Jordan and the sandy hills to see us in a time of great omens. The skies bear a rare snow, like linen, and a bright and ominous star. Would these Wise Men” he says, grinning, “these great astrologers, deign to reveal their meaning to us?”

Herod is putting the PCs on the spot, and he knows it. He just sits there, looking pleased with himself. Looking very, very, disgustingly pleased with himself.

The PCs should be given an opportunity to ramble off some pseudo-biblical rubbish about the star. Santa will continue to question them, and the scene should get nastier and nastier as King Herod's tone becomes more doubtful, his questions more cynical, and his entourage less infatuated with the Player Characters. This is Santa's crowd, and he knows it, and he's having an evil, self-indulgent time playing



He secretly hopes Salome takes a liking to one of the PCs' noggins, I'll bet.

CRANULOIDS FROM PLANET OBULON

Description: The Cranuloids are an ancient “race” of clones – an entire society based on a mythical figure called Number One, and his scientist-wife, Number Two. Every Cranuloid has a number from Three to Nine-Ninety-Nine. There are millions of Cranuloids, and names are often repeated. They are completely ordinary in all ways, except that they’re sterile and “reproduce” by cloning, and that every Cranuloid is a telepath. They keep this latter fact a secret from non-Cranuloids until they trust them.

Clichés: Arch-Eyebrowed Telepath (3), Members of an Advanced Alien Race (3)

them from favor to fervor against the PCs. There are, by the time things get really rude, more than 200 people in the room who dislike the PCs all of a sudden. King Herod will grin wickedly and say “these wretches speak with forked tongues; they are not worthy of our welcome. Wish them fare well.” At which point a soldier yanks a lever, and a powerful, dry wind sucks the PCs down through a trap door into darkness.

Angels Bending Near the Earth

The PCs land on some very dirty straw, in a very dark room. Feels like a cell.

There are five strangers in the room. This will only become apparent once the PCs’ eyes adjust to the dimness of the cell. Thanks to the light of a single torch, they can make out five figures, apparently human – and wearing obvious spacesuits.

Bright characters will immediately realize that these strangers must be the “angels” Rath Bel-Gilrath spoke of, complete with suits of silver and “haloes” in the form of clear bubble-helmets. These aren’t angels, though; they are Cranuloids from Planet Obulon.

The Cranuloids are sleeping off a good deal of alcohol. One of them is half-awake and will address the PCs after watching them for a little while:

“Whoahh. Man, the last thing that I remember, we were walking around this foul city asking after Christ, right? He’s supposed to get born any day now, right,

and we came to meet him? And they take us to this King ... And there’s all these babes, real hot babes. Dirty minds. And the King gave us some ... what was it? Wine. He gave us some wine. Gotta remember to take some wine back to Planet Obulon.”

As the others wake, groggy, they’ll confirm all of this. With a few details changed, it’s the same thing that happened to the PCs. The PCs might also make a tiny leap in logic and realize the truth: the strange “star” that hangs over Jerusalem is the Cranuloids’ starship, in geosynchronous orbit. If the PCs aren’t up

to logical leaping, the Cranuloids will help them along. They’re nice guys. They’re here to see Christ. Why?

“Oh, we want to steal him and destroy him. For the good of the planet. Only we’ve had a hell of a time locating him ... some strange magnetic disturbance, some sunspots, and Number 998 spilled his decanter of flivpolorax all over the bloody sensors. We don’t even have radio contact half the time (he taps his helmet).”

If (let’s go ahead and hope for “when”) the PCs express concern or surprise that these nice aliens wish to

destroy Christ:

“Oh, don’t worry. Christ isn’t a real person. One of our scientists (a rogue) beamed him down onto your planet here so he would get born. He’s an artificial construct, and he has to be destroyed.”

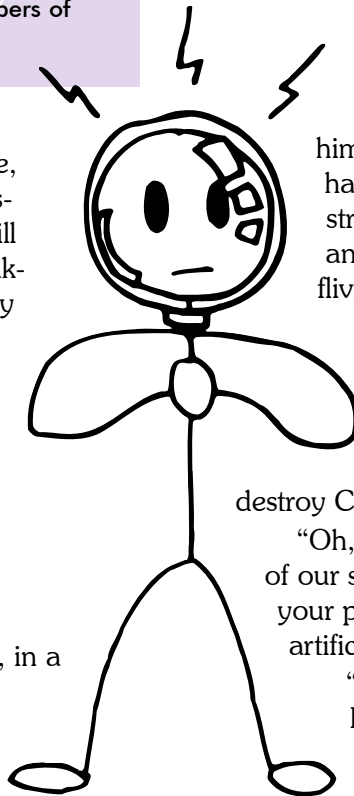
“You see, one of our leading scientists, Doctor Number 343, was contacted by the Obulon High Command and ordered to build a bomb. A **BIG** bomb, capable of destroying an entire planet! Not only this,

but the bomb had to be delivered to that planet several years before it was to be detonated, as a secure secret bomb, see?

The PCs will probably see.

“So the Doc designed a bomb that looked just like a *person*, see? All you have to do is watch some couple on their honeymoon night, and beam the bomb right in. They’ll think it’s a kid. It’ll act like a kid. It’ll even grow up and act like a person ... but when we want it to blow up, it blows up, and the whole planet is destroyed. Neat, isn’t it?”

The might agree that this is neat (if a bit perverse).



“Anyway, the trouble started about a year ago. It seems Doctor Number 343 found out that the bomb was going to be *used for military purposes!* He was offended and shocked, so he stole it from the government labs, and beamed it onto *this planet here*. The one with the wine. And with you guys. And he’s sort of holding the planet hostage, demanding that the Obulon Space Navy be dismantled within 100 chronoquants. If we don’t fix things, he’ll destroy this planet in a massive peace demonstration.”

It’s difficult to guess what the PCs will think about all that. What is there to think?

“Our mission is to wait ‘til the child is born, and then *switch* the kid with a *real* kid that we’ll beam down. As a kind of apologetic bonus, this kid we’ve got is a super-smart, caring kid with all kinds of genetically engineered powers like healing, fish multiplication, and so on. We need to find the kid, set up a beam-link, and make the switch. Easy. Our scientists on the ship can disarm the bomb ... only ... with no radio contact, we can’t reach our ship. And we’re in this cell. And that wine sure was nice.”

BIG HARLEY

Description: Big Harley is the leader of the Bakers for Christ, a fanatical group dedicated to making Christ-shaped loaves of bread and eating them with wine, a la the “last supper.” Harley had a vision of the supper once in a dream, and became obsessed with the whole “communion” concept. His goal is to be the baker who bakes the bread the Christ has that day. He enjoys big slices of crunchy toast slathered with camel butter.

Clichés: Eccentric Baker (4), Ornerly Jerusalem Redneck (4), Charismatic Cult Leader (2)

A Sudden Rescue

There are sounds of shouting and the clash of swords from beyond the cell. Then, a door smashes open, and a band of dozen men in black smocks and black baker’s hats storm into the room wielding swords, and holding large, round shields made of ... stale bread. One of the men, smiling, holds up a bloody, severed hand clenching a ring of keys. “Stubborn guard,” he remarks, in a swashbuckling sort of tone. “Come quickly! King Herod hath been abducted and a false King sits upon his throne! You

strangers are his enemies, and therefore our allies! King Herod’s disgusting twin doth ally with the villainous Big Adam, and they holdest the king at their lair, Adam’s House of Ribs! Come to our aid, as we hath rescued you! Follow us into our secret catacomb!”

Secret Catacombs Smell Like Baking Bread

The PCs and the Cranuloids travel by secret tunnel to Harley’s house and bakery; they’re given bread and wine and invited to sit with the Harley’s entire gang – the Bakers for Christ. Then, Harley himself arrives.

“Visitors,” he says, “We hath rescued you because we believe you are visitors from heaven, and can help us.” He looks at them carefully, as if doubting his own words. “Our contacts doth say that thou,” he points at the PCs, “hath appeared in the midst of the strange storm, coming down from the Mount of Olives! And you,” by which he means the Cranuloids “appeareth from nowhere in the Court of Gentiles! And now, we find that the false king hath imprisoned thee both! We knew that you must be allies. Art thou with us?”

The PCs might ask for a bit more detail on the “with us” business. “With us for what?” sort of thing.

“The rescue, of course! Adam, the owner of Adam’s House of Ribs, has the real King Herod held prisoner, guarded by his men and by the false king’s lazy brother. The false king gave Herod to Adam as a gift, knowing that he and his cannibals would eventually be rid of him as a feast!”

“Cannibals?” the PCs might ask.

“Yes! They call themselves the Cannibals for Christ! And they are our bitter foes.” At this point, he relates the short tale of the twin visions (see the sidebar if you haven’t done so yet). “We must rescue the real King tonight, or he may be in rib baskets by morning – if he isn’t already!”

“The false king’s lazy brother?” the PCs might also ask.

“Yes, I think he foisted his brother off to Adam to be rid of him. The false king is evil, but his brother is both evil *and* worthless.”

“Cannibals?” the PCs might ask again, especially if they had some of those yummy, memorable ribs when they were visiting Adam’s.

CONFLICTING INTERPRETATIONS

A year ago, Harley had a vision (in a dream) of famous and often-painted “the Last Supper” near the end of Christ’s life on earth. This included the whole communion/Eucharist bit about eating the body and drinking the blood of Christ. Symbolically, of course, give or take a transubstantiation or two.

Harley decided that he’d been given this dream because it’s his destiny to bake the actual loaf that Christ will use at the Last Supper. So, he’s dedicated his life to practicing, and to preparing himself for that eventual solemn duty. He’s also taken it upon himself to gather friends to his cause (a baker gang, if you will), and to keep an eye on Christ-related activities.

A year ago, another man – the rib-merchant named Adam, had exactly the same dream. But he interpreted it without apparent grasp of any of the symbolism involved. He decided he’d been given this dream because it’s his destiny to consume Christ more literally, and to share the experience with others through his own craft – inexpensive barbecue. Ugh. Furthermore, he’s recently decided that he isn’t in the mood to wait – he wants Christ as soon as some Christ is available.

You can see where this would cause problems, I’m sure.

BIG ADAM

Description: Big Adam is a cannibal cult-leader, and the owner of Adam’s House of Ribs. Adam is an odd duck who, like Big Harley, had a vision of the future Last Supper. Unlike Harley, Adam interpreted it very literally, and he intends to kidnap the Christ-child with barbecue in mind.

Clichés: Eccentric Rib Chef (5), Vicious Madman (2) Charismatic Cult Leader (3)



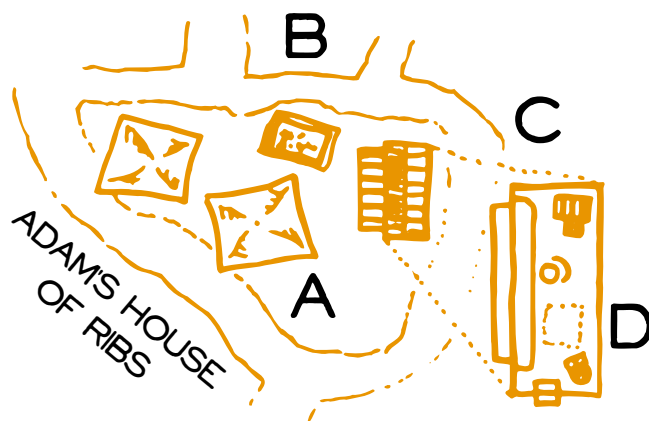
A classy thing to say is: “When you burp, you can sort of taste ‘em all over again.”

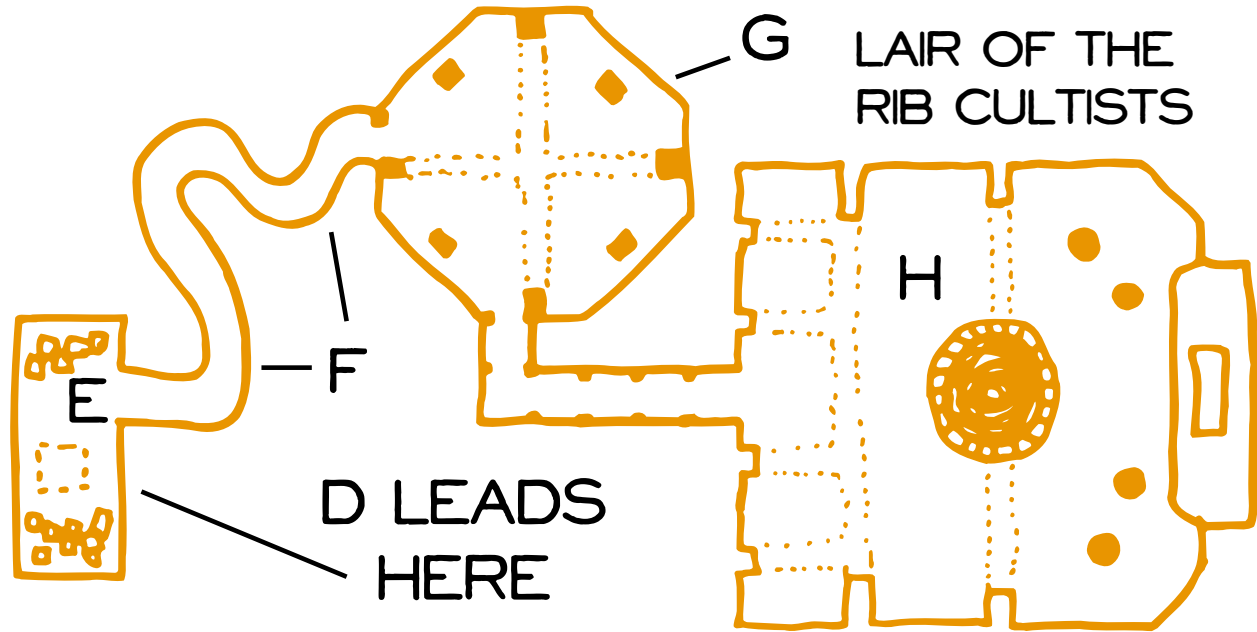
Lair of the Rib Cultists

The rescue of King Herod amounts to a miniature dungeon-crawl in the secret chambers beneath Adam’s House of Ribs. The PCs need to make haste, but they can approach it any way they see fit. They may also want to recruit help – either Harley’s fellow bakers or the alien Cranuloids. If you’d enjoy having the extra NPCs along to beef up the dialogue potential, make ‘em available. If not, here are two convenient excuses:

- **Harley’s Men:** Harley admits (with much apologetic hand-wringing) that he’s lost most of his men on raids against the false king. The men that rescued the PCs, and the few straggling bakers here in the lair (many of them elderly) are all he has left to defend against possible sneak-attack from Adam. Harley will assure the PCs, though, that “Adam’s House is but a lousy rib shack, and it doth pose no real challenge for Visitors From Heaven such as thineselves.”
- **The Cranuloids:** Harley gave them wine. Remember how much they like wine? They’ve been drinking more while the PCs have been chatting with Harley, and it hits them *hard*. They’re soused to the gills. If you think this is bad, you should see what happens when they eat corn chips. When traveling the galaxy, it’s very important to bring your own food.

Adam’s House of Ribs stands on the north side of town – the PCs might already know the way. Externally, it’s just an outdoor dining area (**Area A**), a coal pit (**Area B**), and the above-ground portion of the lair (**Area C**), which resembles a pretty ordinary



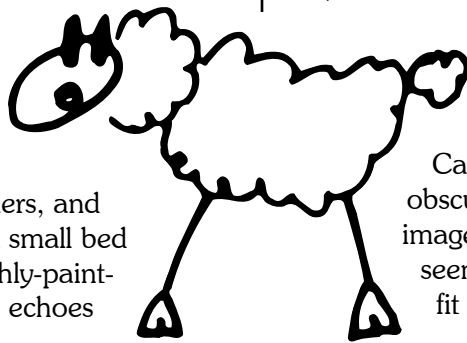


building decked out for fresh-air BBQ sales. Note that the dining area has a colorful tarp above it to protect diners from the sun; yanking this from the poles can be useful in a fight scene, if one happens outdoors. The sign announcing the shop's wares (see page 47) stays on display even after-hours. It's important that the PCs take note of it now, if they haven't read it before.

Adam lives in the first sub-level of the Rib Shack. This basement complex predates Adam's cult (by a coincidence, this *used* to be the headquarters for a cult of vegetarian sheep worshippers). Either Adam or one of his flunkies is on duty at the counter during business hours. Here's a map key that may come in handy:

Area D (Trap Door): In the floor of the sales-shack, and in the ceiling of area E, is a wooden trap door. It is unlocked and (fortunately) well-oiled.

Area E (Storage Cellar): Lots of clay urns filled with barbecue sauce stand here, along with stacks of papyrus sacks, rib basket liners, and other general supplies. There's also a small bed where Adam sleeps, and a large, freshly-painted sign leaning against one wall, that echoes the more public sign the PCs saw outdoors, but with a few Jesusy changes (see the Player Handouts for the spiffy prop version).



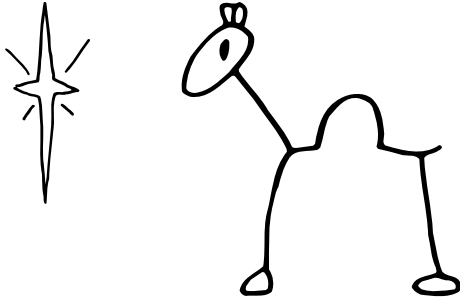
Haunting sheep and vegetable imagery looks on, faded, from nearly every surface.

Area F (Creepy Corridor): This dark and twisty corridor slopes sharply downward (everyone will notice this, not just Dwarves and Gnomes). Guttering torchlight casts dancing shadows, and the PCs can make out faded frescoes of dancing sheep and oversized images of avocados. These are left over from the earlier inhabitants of the lair. If anyone has a cliché that seems well-suited to spying or listening, allow them a Difficulty 10 roll to notice a distinct *bubbling* sound in the distance. Blurple, blorp. Blurpleblorp. Bldoolp.

Area G (Gratuitous Octagonal Room): Every underground complex needs one. It's what graph paper is for. There's nothing here apart from a few crates of vacuum-packed, pre-made shepherd pie (not *shepherd's pie*; shepherd's pie has no human flesh in it). The bubbling sound is now very obvious.

Area H (Barbecue Temple Chamber): This is a small but ornate temple outfitted with cannibal cookery gear, an altar, pews, and similar stuff. Cannibal slogans adorn the walls, nearly obscuring yet more faded sheep and avocado imagery. The most often-repeated slogan seems to be "If you can't argue with it, it isn't fit to eat."

There's a bubbling pit of hot barbecue sauce in the middle of the chamber. The real King Herod, barely conscious, hangs above it, suspended



by copper chains (which have, as it happens, really helped with his arthritis). Lazy Santa Claus is here, decked out in local garb, along with Big Adam and a handful of the Cannibals for Christ. Here's how the scene is *likely* to shake down, though you never can tell, with PCs around:

- **King Herod** isn't of much help unless the PCs are having their asses handed to them, in which case he can wake up enough to start swinging around on his chains bopping people on the head. Otherwise, he's just hanging there groaning, only dimly aware of what's going on.
- **Lazy Santa Claus** will be very shocked to see the PCs, and go "hey..." If they attack him, he'll go "hey ..." again, adding a weak "... ho" (he can't even be bothered to laugh with a multiple "ho"). He'll look around, expecting Adam's cultists to defend him.
- **Adam's Cultists** are gnawing on supper, which fortunately isn't (yet) King Herod. They'll smile, wipe the barbecue sauce (*we hope* it's barbecue sauce) from their lips, and attack. There's one for every PC; they attack as individuals.
- **Adam** will dance around and try to avoid direct conflict, letting his men handle it. He'll run, instead, for a handle on the far wall that's attached to a kind of leash around Herod's neck. He'll threaten to yank it, breaking the king's neck. This is a separate, verbal combat scene – play it out like any other "I'm a lunatic with a hostage" scene you've seen on police dramas. If the PCs do really well, they can reduce Adam to tears. The PCs can then give him the counseling and/or beating he needs.

If the PCs don't come up with some sort of amusing tactic involving the barbecue sauce, shame on them.

COMPRESSING OR EXPANDING THIS CHAPTER

In Jerusalem, the PCs have plenty of freedom to explore, but everything as-written hedges the PCs toward the meeting with "King Herod" (Stuck-Up Santa Claus), but the meeting is really just a prologue to being tossed in a cell to meet the Cranuloids of Planet Obulon, and that – in turn – helps them become aware of the Bakers for Christ. This is a fun path to follow, but it can be just as fun to short-circuit or rewrite it, especially if you're pressed for time and need to compress the chapter. The PCs can be tossed in jail without ever meeting the King ... and for that matter, Harley's men can approach them in the streets of Jerusalem without any need for them to be tossed in jail. In terms of comedic potential, it's actually more important for them to eat ribs at Adam's, than it is for them to put up with Stuck-Up Santa's smug gloating.

To *expand* the Jerusalem section, begin by being a freakin' loon. Once you've got that down pat, consider that my arbitrarily-chosen date for Christ's birth (6 B.C.) is questionable. Historians figure he was born anywhere from 8 to 4 B.C., possibly in the springtime (nobody can be sure, but the bit about shepherds and their nocturnal flock-abiding convince some folks it was the spring). Well, as it happens, the most common date for King Herod's death is the spring of 4 B.C. – he died in Jericho, but it's an easy matter to move the secret cannibal temple there. It's not even a terribly long trip. Do that, and you can make Herod's death a consequence of the adventure in some way.

In Thy Dark Streets Shineth ...

The PCs can rest for the night at Harley's place. They haven't had much rest since arriving, most likely, so they'll probably crash pretty hard, preparing for tomorrow evening – the big event. The birth of Jesus Christ and (by extension) the foundation of an event that Envious Santa wants entirely for himself.

Bethlehem is just a few miles south of Jerusalem; Harley can tell the PCs the way, and offer them a sackful of fresh loaves of bread to enjoy on their journey. The Cranuloids, it seems, have already left. When the PCs awake, they are gone. Harley says that they were gone when he woke up, as well. A mystery, but not a pressing one, perhaps.

The PCs should probably go back to the Mount of Olives, get the Reindeer, and *fly* to Bethlehem. If they forget and just start walking, Dasher and the team will fly over their heads to remind them.

Bethlehem is tiny village, with lots of shepherds and sheep and goats and things. There's only one inn, and of course it's packed for the spring tourist season. There's a small "No Vacancy – Manger In Back" sign hanging on the front door. The sun is setting, and a strange, beautiful glow begins to emerge from behind the inn. If the PCs peek around the corner, they will see some Groovy Boxed Text:

Your eyes come to rest on a peaceful and familiar scene ... it is the Nativity, with all the trimmings. There are Joseph and Mary, sitting quietly among a group of adoring animals (many of which aren't otherwise found in this part of the world). There is a baby in the manger, wrapped in swaddling clothes, and glowing with strange alien energies that could blow the world to smithereens. Santa Claus, wearing the robes of King Herod and screaming angrily, tumbles into the scene, wrestling with one of the Cranuloids from Planet Obulon, while four other aliens run around the manger shouting "It's already glowing! It's already glowing!" Joseph and Mary start in alarm, as Santa grabs the child. One of the Cranuloids grabs it from *him*, and a *second* glowing child appears in the cradle in a burst of electric light. Another Cranuloid grabs that child to keep it safe, fakes out Santa in a dodge, and passes the child to yet another Cranuloid. Santa pulls a *third* glowing infant from beneath his white robes, and declares "*this* child will make the name of Santa synonymous with his own!" just as one of the other Cranuloids grabs it from him and trades it with another ... Santa is fuming, and the Cranuloids are panicking. Mary faints. Someone tosses one of the babies directly toward you.

Take a deep breath. Look at the players. See if they caught any of that. Don't offer to re-read it. Catching the baby is a Difficulty 10 task for any cliché that seems athletic. Failing the roll would be so embarrassing.

THE VERY BEST EGGNOG ON RISUS EARTH

12 egg yolks
12 egg whites, beaten until retaining stiff peaks
2 ½ cups sugar
2 quarts milk
1 quart heavy cream, beaten until vaguely thick
1 quart unbeaten cream
1 quart booze (2 parts spiced rum, 1 part brandy, 1 part bourbon)
A spice blend (1 part ground cinnamon, 4 parts grated nutmeg)

Antonio was a little uncomfortable when I asked for the most appropriate beverage for wrestling for custody of Baby Jesus, until I explained that I didn't mean *legal* custody. Antonio isn't particularly spiritual, but he does have a healthy fear of the court system for reasons buried quietly in his past.

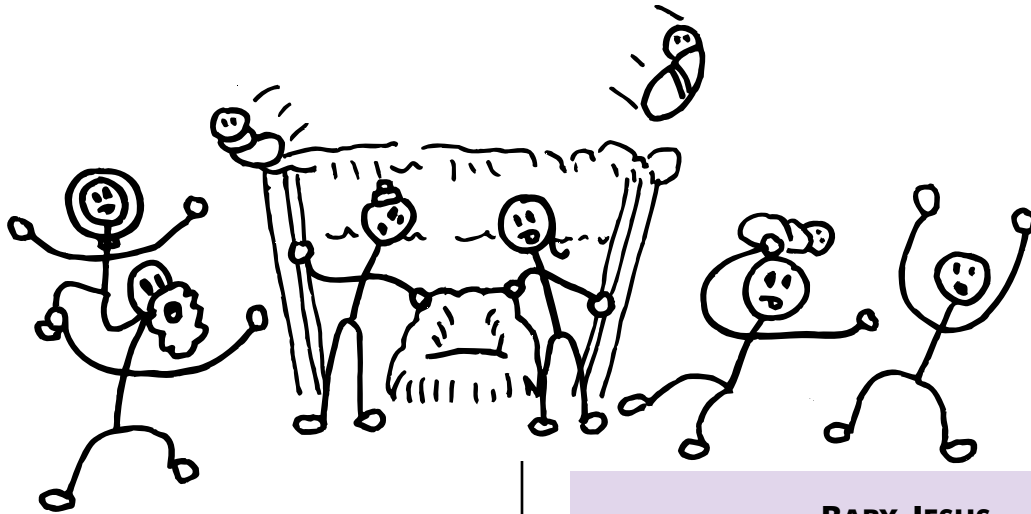
In a large glass bowl, whisk the egg-yolks until they turn a pale yellow. Very slowly beat the sugar into the yolks, and then (just as slowly) add the booze. Fold the whipped cream into the mixture, and stir in the remaining milk and cream. Chill thoroughly, preferably overnight. Beat and fold in the egg whites before serving. Keep bowl on ice to thoroughly chill the nog. Liberally dust the mixture with the nutmeg/cinnamon blend. Makes five quarts.

Do the "whisking" with an electric beater if you've got one; this saves a lot of wrist injuries every Christmas. However, the purist should note that Antonio does it all by hand (rumor has it that he doesn't even use a whisk). If you're omitting the alcohol, add an additional quart of light cream.

QUIZ ANSWER FROM PAGE 27 (DON'T PEEK UNTIL YOU TAKE THE QUIZ)

This is one of those cheezy trick-question quizzes where all the movies are real. Just for the record, I haven't seen any of the films in question, but the reviews I've read are kindest to *One Magic Christmas*, while warning that it may not be the kind of Disney family feature you actually show to your family, what with the shooting and the drowning and the Harry Dean Stanton and all. I guess that makes it almost a brother to *A Kringle in Time*, which you shouldn't show to your family, either.

For my own part, I think that the phrase "directed by Arnold Schwarzenegger" may be the funniest and most overtly blasphemous concept in this entire module.



Building Your Nativity Scene

This is all you need to know about what's happening:

- There are three glowing infants. One is the Bomb Christ. Another is the Planet Obulon Replacement Christ. The final one is the Santa Claus Shill Christ. They all look exactly alike and they're being tossed back and forth a lot. One of them has been tossed to the PCs. I have no idea which one. Here's hoping you do.
- Mary and Joseph just sit there like bumps on logs.
- Santa and the Cranuloids are running around after each other snatching and re-snatching babies from one another.
- Santa intends to kill the Cranuloids and the PCs at some point.
- In the end, one of the infants will be beamed into space to the Cranuloid mothership.
- In the end, one of the infants *should* be safely placed in the cradle, where it will say "goo" and smile contentedly.
- In the end, one of the infants will be left over. I recommend that the PCs be encouraged to keep it and raise it as their very own, leading to amusing baby-care subplot humor.

BABY JESUS

He's so cute.

Clichés: Baby Jesus (6)

How can you tell which baby is which? You can't, obviously. But, as any fan of time travel fiction knows, time can take care of itself, no matter how much well-meaning time-travelers try to help. Let the PCs argue and juggle and flip coins and whatever else they need to do. In the best-case scenario, the bomb will be beamed up and deactivated, the Planet Obulon Replacement Christ will become a famous teacher and healer, and the PCs will end up raising a genetically engineered Santa Claus fanatic.

It's enough to make you cry.

I AM A POOR BOY, TOO

If you've got a little extra time to enjoy and you'd like to give your Jerusalem adventure a fun finish, make it impossible for the PCs to get any *normal* nativity gifts like gold and resin (or deprive them of them by means of theft or wanton destruction). This will leave the PCs standing around at the nativity with nothing to offer except a couple of Santa Claus corpses (and they need to keep those). Yeah, sure, they saved the kid's life, but it's still polite to bring a gift when you have a fight scene in someone's manger. So, here's the gag: have an NPC (Dasher works best, but if King Herod's around that'd make for a cute irony) suggest that the PCs pull a "little drummer boy" and each offer up gifts of their own devising – either presents from their own pile of adventuring gear, or a demonstration of their skills in some way. Have the players stand up and act it out.

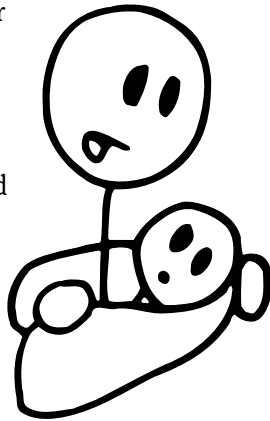
Chapter Five: Dash Away, Dash Away, Dash Away All!

*"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.

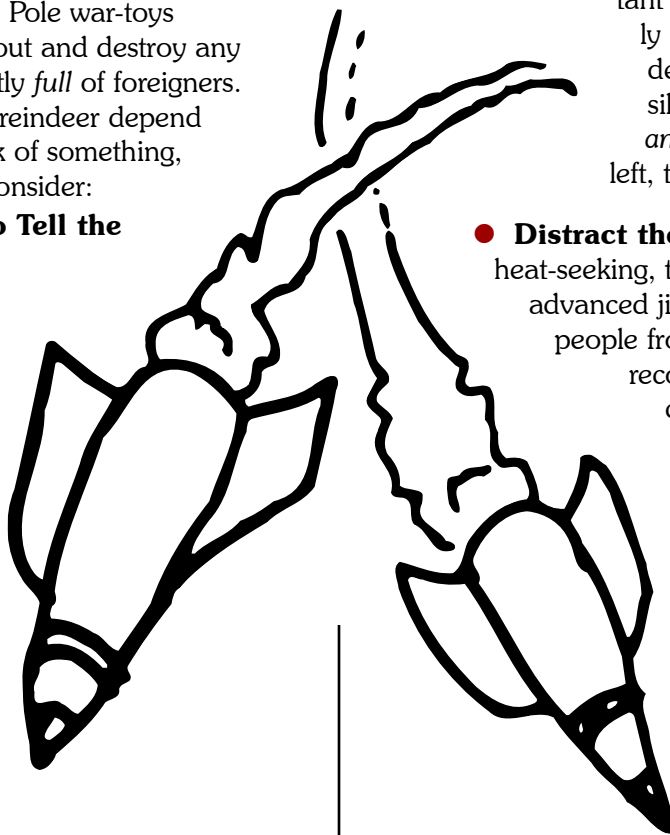
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(Continued)

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.

GIVE THE GIFT OF EVIL

Yes, the idea of distracting a guided missile by throwing baby Jesus out of the sleigh is *particularly* sinful ... But if the players would find it funny you can set it up *and* (if you're good) make the PCs think they thought of it. Give it a try: have Dasher scream something about the "foreigner-seeking" properties of the missile at the same time you announce that baby made another stinky. The PCs will handle the rest in a moment of shameful hilarity. Besides, it's 66% likely to be a fake Jesus anyway. On the other hand, it's 33% likely to be a bomb, which is another way to compress this adventure into fewer sessions.

- **Just Sit There Like Idiots:** If they stammer or argue or run around the room gaping at each other and yelling, well, that's adorable. A missile hits the sleigh and everything blows up and they all get very injured and covered with char and wind up unconscious on the forest floor, scattered in a hundred-yard oval or thereabouts. What schmucks. Doesn't matter too much, really; the missiles are just there because it's never a bad idea to start a new chapter with a little make-sure-they're-awake action scene.

We Got Upsot

The PCs find themselves in a thickly wooded slope, in deep snow. It's dark. Dasher will explain that those missiles were only toys – the real danger lies ahead. He'll butt antlers with the rest of the team to form a plan of attack. If the PCs lack antlers (pretty likely), he'll loan them some fake ones for the purpose.

The reindeer all agree that the most important thing is to head straight for Mrs. Claus' secret Elf Rebellion cottage, which is deep in the forest beyond the main village to the west (pardon my use of cardinal directions for the sake of convenience; things get tricky in a magic kingdom right at the North Pole). Dasher insists that everyone gather what they can from the wreckage of the sleigh (if it's wrecked) and get moving. The Santa corpses can be dragged on small sleds improvised from the wreckage or from sacks left in the back. The sleigh – even if it's still

intact – is a liability, now. They must all become little Christmas Ninja and make their way discreetly to the headquarter of the Elf Rebellion.

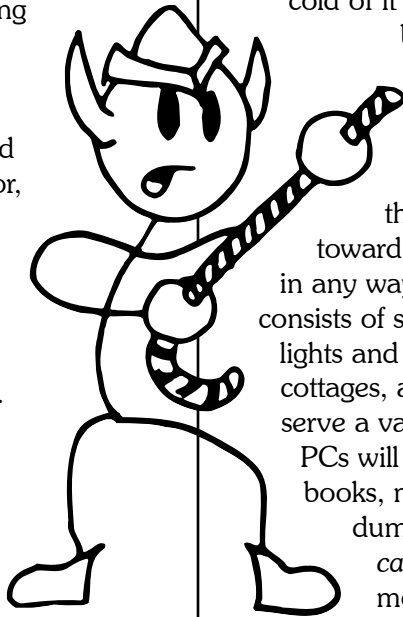
The Reindeer can walk easily on top of the snow without sinking. The PCs may have a more difficult time crunching and trudging through the darkness, depending on what magic or technology they have handy.

The Horrors of War

As our heroes, teeth chattering, explore the bizarre ruins of Santa's fairyland, keep in mind the deep and constantly falling snow (it's *always* snowing), the brisk breeze, and the generally toe-chilling cold of it all. In the more populated areas, remember the thick smoke, crackling flames and smell of carbon-and-gingerbread, burned-flesh-and-peppermint. Dust your descriptions liberally with these.

Let the party make any preparations they want before marching down the hill toward their destination – they can approach it in any way they feel comfortable with. The valley consists of several well-lit lanes strung with colored lights and wreaths, about four dozen tiny, happy cottages, and four small factories, that seem to serve a variety of functions. On the ground, the PCs will occasionally find burned dolls, story-books, model racecars, oversized vibrators, or toy dump trucks. (Yes, that's right: *model* racecars. Don't be a prude. Lots of people have model racecars). Dasher explains that this is one of several general purpose construction centers – the cottages belong to the Elves that run the factories. He also points out that it was *not* burning when he left. Improvise locales and atmosphere at need. At some point, the PCs notice some Groovy Boxed Text:

As you approach what was once a cheerful village square, you notice out of the corner of your eye a tiny Elf, his clothes singed from the flames, hiding in a dark alley with a large candy-cane shaped gun in his arms. The straight end of the giant confection is pointed at all of you. He seems *terrified*.



CHRISTMAS ELF

Description: These are the tiny, squeaky-voiced minions of Santa's once-benevolent gift-distribution industry. They are master toymakers. They like singing Christmas carols, are *exceptionally* good harmonizers, and can be engaged in battles of song instead of physical fights. Many of them are painfully naïve, convinced that no child would use an official Doctor Napalm Excessively Realistic Rocket Launcher to harm anyone. Some of the Elves are loyal to the "New Christmas Order;" most are terrified by it – even many of those serving in Santa's fortress. Santa knows this, and that's why he has his robot-minded NutCrackers acting as dungeon guards.

Clichés: Jolly Toymaker (5), Natural-Born Adventurer (3), Christmas Caroler (3)

Note: Some Elves also have the additional cliché, Dentistry (2); some loyal to Envious Santa Claus now have the Goose-Stepping Bullyboy (3) cliché, as well.

This is Sparkles, a frightened Christmas Elf who's gone over the deep end; he's experiencing Currently Traumatic Stress Disorder. Worse, he's armed with a deadly Cane Sliver Rifle, which fires high-velocity spars of peppermint that can punch through a grizzly at 60 yards. Once he's spotted, he'll stumble toward the mouth of the alleyway, wagging the candycane at the party, trying to get them to cluster together.

Sparkles isn't sane at all. These are some things he might say in response to any attempt to disarm him, console him, ask him questions, etc. Roll randomly or just go down the list at need:

- "Alice!" he'll scream, looking at a random party member. "What have they done to you? Are you all right?"
- "Ohmygosh! They've got you, too! And after I gave you all of that *cough syrup!*"
- He falls to the ground in a laughing fit, discharging his weapon at random and singing "Joy to the World" at the top of his tiny lungs ("And heav'n and nature sing! And heav'n and nature sing!").
- "What have these *monsters* done to you???"



The PCs might choose to do verbal battle with Sparkles, talking him into a quieter, more reasonable state. Or, they might choose to do physical battle with Sparkles, beating him into a quieter, more reasonable state. Or, they might perform any number of other creative tricks to shove Sparkles into the quieter and more reasonable arena. Whether he's calmed down by soothing words or lying gasping his last breath in the snow, they'll get a brief sensible dialogue from him when all is said and done. The PCs can learn the following points, in this approximate order, as they probe for questions (and as the reindeer interrupt):

- "The big tower was finished about three days ago – it went up overnight! It was horrible! These *snowmen* came down out of the citadel and started taking over everything. They took the war-toy factory on the first day! They've enslaved the Elves – they've even got Lumpkin!"
- "Lumpkin was the head Elf at preadolescent R&D. He was ... *close* to Samantha – Mrs. Claus I mean. They had a little affair going on behind Santa's back, I think. Of course, to be fair, I had an affair with Samantha for a while too, and so did Wiggleshins, and little Bingle, and ..."

"Yeah," says Comet. "I did, too."

"Me, too," admits Dasher. "Comet – ?"
"Yeah?"

"Did she like to do that *thing* with you ... with the mints?"

A tear comes to Comet's eye. "Yeah ..." He takes a deep, breath, and forcibly holds back his tears.

"God, I hope she's okay."

"Yeah," says Comet.

The Reindeer and the Elf stare into space for a time, sadly. Finally, Sparkles breaks the silence. "I think they're trying to force her out of hiding, 'cause Lumpkin was her – you know – her favorite. He *knows* things, too. You've got to save him!

Without him and the missus, all of Toyland and Christmas is doomed!"

At this point, he'll die (if he was shot or stabbed by the PCs), or collapse and start humming tunelessly to himself (if he's physically healthy). He doesn't know anything else really useful. If asked about Alice, he'll break into heavy sobbing and explain that Alice was his electric pencil sharpener.

Samantha's Cottage

The route to Mrs. Claus' cottage is a strange one, following a path through treacherous holly bushes and sticky pine boughs. Dasher explains that "The missus always liked to have her own private place away from all of the hustle and the bustle, you know."

"Yeah," says Comet. "She keeps her whips and oil and stuff out here where Santa doesn't kn—"

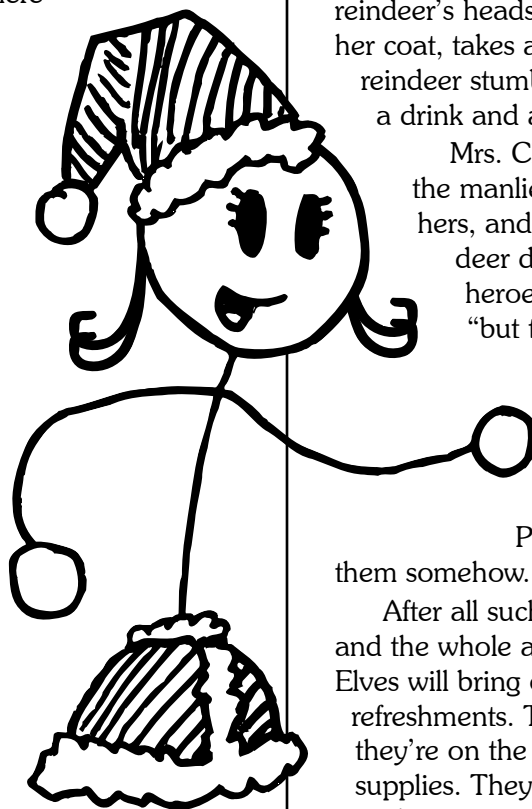
"Shut up, Comet!" shouts Dasher. "That's not polite."

"Oh, yeah. I'm sorry."

After a second, the PCs can see it – a tiny little cottage, undisturbed by the wars raging across the winter fairyland that surrounds it. Warm light pours from the windows onto the snow, and the Christmas lights twinkle quietly. Two Elves stand guard at the doorway, holding Cane Sliver Rifles. When they see the reindeer, they grin, and rush out to give everyone a good handshake. The PCs are welcomed like the heroes they may occasionally be. The reindeer are combing their hair back and stampeding into the cottage. The Elves lead the PCs in, too, to "meet the missus."

The PCs find themselves in a warm living room, with blinking Christmas lights, Nat King Cole on the stereo, and one of the most deliciously built, sexiest, and affectionate women in the universe laughing and hugging reindeer while a crowd of Elves looks on dreamily, swaying where they stand, smitten. Samantha's wearing her traditional garb – a feminine version of her husband's red coat, cut about four inches below the waist in a Christmassy miniskirt, and with a neckline that plunges so rapidly it probably gets the bends.

"Oh, Dasher, Comet, my baby reindeer!" she's saying as the PCs walk in, "You brought the heroes we need!" She smiles at the PCs. "And they're such healthy specimens, too ..."



Dasher nods. "These folks are real heroes – you should have seen them in action!" The PCs can grin a lot and mumble modestly or sign autographs or tell war-stories or whatever. "We saw the new fortress when we flew in. They tried to gun us down, but we –" he nods in the direction of the PCs, "we did okay."

"We really missed you," says Comet, nuzzling close to Samantha's plunging neckline and inhaling.

She hugs them both again, in such a way that the reindeer's heads are momentarily lost in the folds of her coat, takes a deep breath, and lets them go. Both reindeer stumble, dazed. The Elves hand them each a drink and a cigarette.

Mrs. Claus stands, and takes the hands of the manliest-looking member of the party in hers, and stares deep into his eyes. "My reindeer did well in bringing such talented heroes here." She sighs and looks away ...

"but they've taken poor Lumpkin and so many others to the new castle! And

Santa – my poor husband, overtaken by evil ..." She hangs her head, and her red hair cascades over her shoulders. If any of the

PCs think to console here, she'll thank them somehow.

After all such information has been exchanged, and the whole atmosphere is chummy, some of the Elves will bring out some ham sandwiches and other refreshments. They don't have any booze, though; they're on the lam and are making do with limited supplies. They *like* booze, though ... If any party member totes a hip flask or anything, they'll be extremely grateful for a swig of it, and Samantha just might be forced to take the generous PC into a back room for a few minutes. She does things like that. We won't refer to it again (it isn't polite), but that doesn't

MRS. SAMANTHA CLAUS

Description: The curvaceous, red-headed, gently freckled, sparkle-eyed, oversexed young wife of Santa Claus, Samantha truly and dearly loves her husband. She also truly and dearly loves the Reindeer, the Elves, all the children of the world, the PCs, and her collection of paper clips.

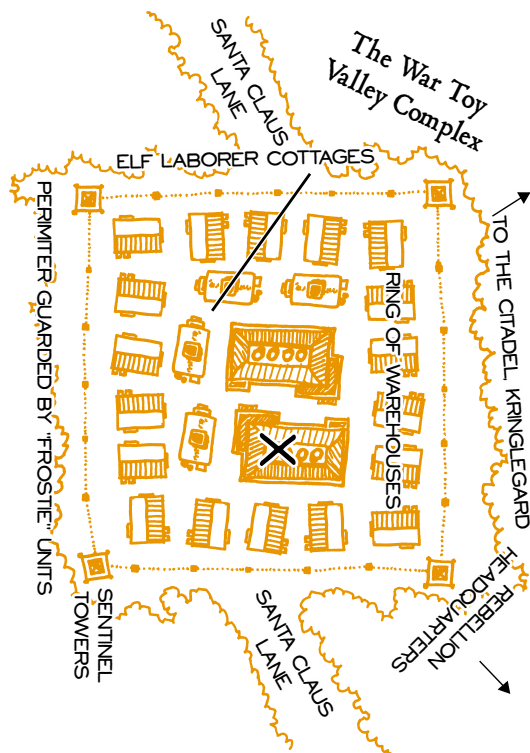
Clichés: Christmas Icon (2), Cat on a Hot Tin Roof (6), Resistance Leader (3)

mean you can't. It's your game, and you can be as perverse and descriptive as you please! Throw off the shackles of decency!

Blank space provided for salacious notes, images, naughty stick-figures, etc.

Then Mrs. Claus, exhausted and relaxed, will set aside the oil and the rubber wine bottle to tell what she knows. One of the Elves will un-harness the yak. The following shouldn't be a solid monologue – wait for the appropriate questions from the PCs, and add your own character-bits.

- “The citadel is surrounded by moats. The outer moat is filled with molten lava; we haven't gotten close enough to be sure what's in the others ... the middle one has *something* moving around in what looks like water. The walls separating these moats are forty feet high, and covered in electrified spikes. The courtyard beyond is filled with large piles of snow – maybe they're building something.”
- “The main problem, of course, isn't the moats at all – it's the Energy Shields. They're barely visible as a shimmer, but they can annihilate anything.
- “Fortunately, a few of our remaining spies brought us this –” she pulls a rolled-up map from the middle of her coat. The map shows a rough outline of the War-Toy valley, which is now a chain-linked factory complex.
- “This valley is guarded by Frosties – Santa's new snowmen troops. It's where the weapons are manufactured, but there's no moat or Energy Shield, so you may be able to slip in under cover of darkness.
- “Under this factory, here [she points to the factory marked with an “X” on the map handout], there is a secret passageway into the dungeons beneath the tower.



And that's pretty much that. The reindeer will wait here with the Rebellion, and Mrs. Claus and the Elves will volunteer to take care of baby Jesus *if* the PCs think to ask. If they bring baby Jesus along, he'll need changing at least once during the mission (just *prior* to the least convenient possible time, so one of the PCs will be busy with him when the least convenient possible time actually arrives). If the PCs threw baby Jesus at a missile, the reindeer won't mention it to anyone if they don't.

“It's simple,” says Dasher. “You kill Envious Santa, and if his wicked soul escapes and any of the corpses on *this* end wake up, we'll shoot it repeatedly in the head.”

Right Down Santa Claus Lane

The Elves have little to offer the PCs beyond refreshments, some Cane Sliver Rifles, and ninja-style all-black parkas with sable-lined face masks. Once the PCs are ready, an Elf scout will lead them through as far as the forest end of Santa Claus Lane – the road that leads directly into the valley. See the map, and make the trip as harrowing or as segue-esque as you prefer:

- **Elf Barracks:** These are quaint giant cottage-shaped apartment buildings used to house the Elves that build the war toys. Each contains several apartments, a laundry room, a TV room with magazines strewn about, and a Coke machine. There are no “coed” arrangements, since there are no female Elves. Most of the magazines in the TV room are pretty racy stuff.
- **Main Factories:** There are two of these – big ol’ factory floors with huge ceilings and lots of dangerous equipment.
- **Warehouses:** There are a bunch of these – stacked to the ceilings with enough toy weaponry to take over the planet. And if Santa should get *upset*, that’s precisely what he intends to do.
- **Guard Towers:** Frosty-manned and hastily erected, each of these commands an inspiring view and has a spotlight.

As the PCs move toward the valley (whether by road or by forest) they’ll notice that it’s heavily illuminated, both around the buildings and at the perimeters. Frosty squads march past any given point of the

FROSTIES

Description: Wicked magical snow-golems, loyal to Envious Santa and his cause. They look like ordinary, peaceful snowmen, with a corncob pipe and a button nose and two eyes made out of coal (the officers have a carrot nose, instead). They each wear a battered silk top-hat and wield a Cane Sliver Rifle, a dangerous confection capable of fully automatic fire in either Peppermint or Cinnamon modes. Frosties prowl the dark corners of the North Pole, seeking and destroying traitors to the master Claus. The Frosties are stupid, though. They’re simple-minded grunts that fall easily for distraction tactics. They aren’t much for dialogue – they aren’t even badass enough to deliver post-attack one-liners apart from “Happy BOIT-day!”

Cliché: Mindless Servant (3). They can form grunt-squads worth up to 10 dice, total.

Special Weaknesses: Anyone using fiery weapons (flamethrowers, napalm, phosphorous launchers, cigarette lighters, slices of warm toast) against a Frostie doubles the result of any combat rolls against the easily meltable fiends. Anyone removing a Frosty’s silk hat will reduce it to a pile of lifeless snow.

freshly-built chain-link fence once every 120 seconds, and each of the three entry gates is manned by *two* Frosty squads.

Let the PCs do whatever they need to do to get in. Note that Cane Sliver Rifles are *not* very silent weapons.

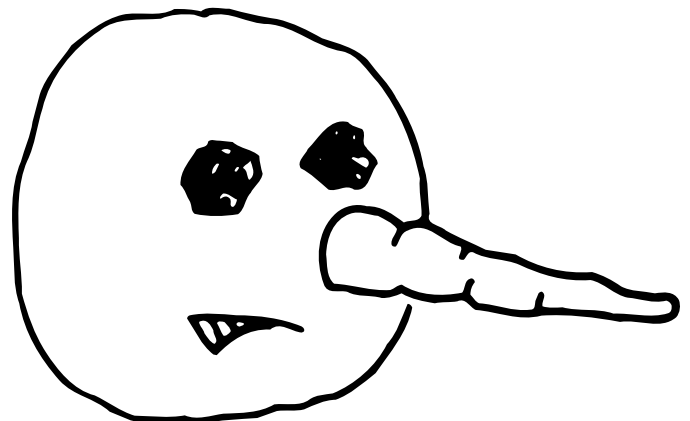
Warehouse Five

After the PCs have penetrated the perimeter, read the following Groovy Boxed Text to reward them:

You find yourself at the gigantic ring of warehouses surrounding the valley interior. Two of these blocky structures – one painted red, another painted green – are nearby. Both are completely still, and the high windows show no hint of interior light.

Suddenly, a blaring klaxon kicks on from a hundred yards away, and spotlights from the guard towers begin moving, sweeping and probing the forest, the grounds, and the nearby warehouses. Blinding white circles of light slide over and between the nearby buildings, searching. You hear Frosty squadrons mobilizing. You notice that both the warehouses have doors that you can access quickly ...

Unless they’re outrageously eager for mass carnage, they’ll probably decide that discretion is the better part of wearing a ninja parka. But then give them your best evil squinty look and ask: *Which* warehouse, then? The *Red Warehouse* (cackle, cackle) or the *Greeeeeeen Warehouse*? (deep, evil laughter)?



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?”

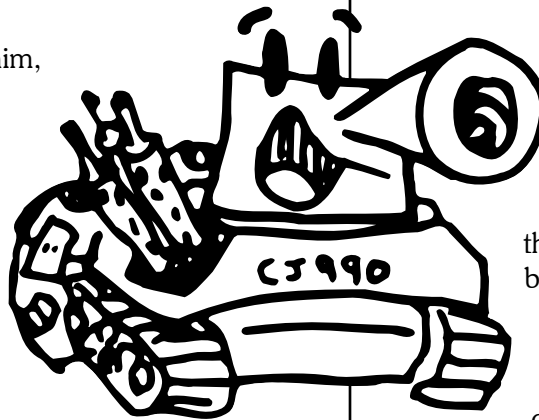
If the PCs don't shoot at him, he'll be just as friendly. From this point, the dialogue might go as follows:

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)

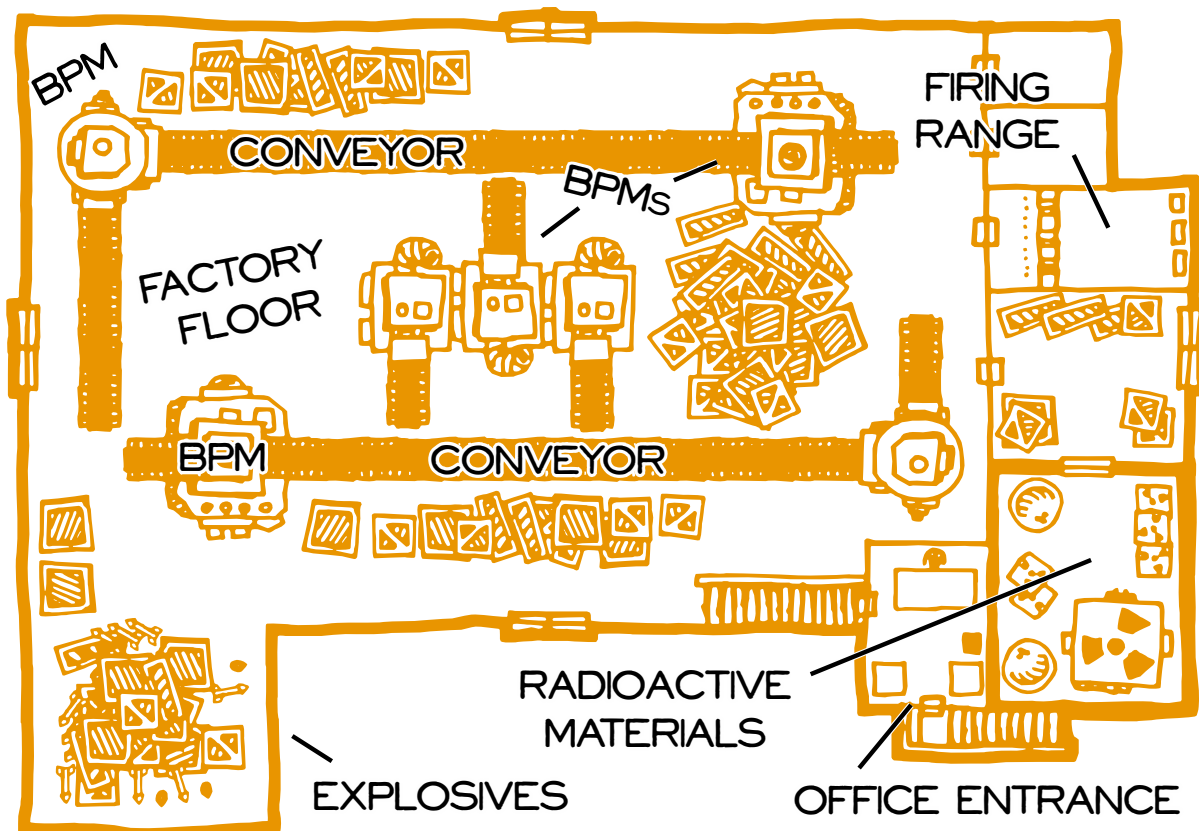
Willie is an unwanted toy. “None of the children wanted to pway wif me! They was scared by me!” is his version of the story, and it's essentially true. He's an R&D discard, mothballed here with an uncertain future.

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 turncoat 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

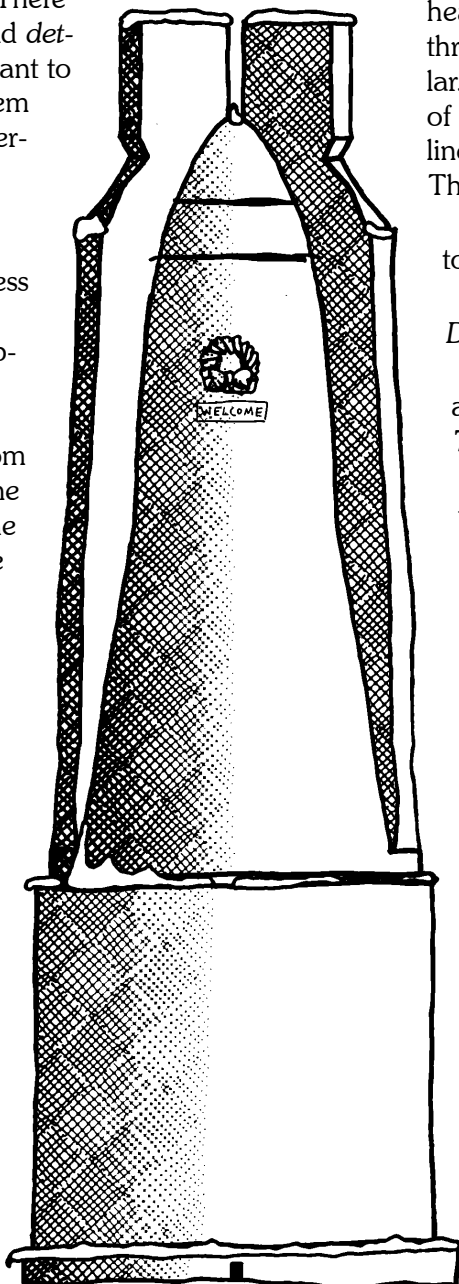
conveyors move pretty slowly under most circumstances, but there are gigantic red “High Speed” levers, of course. Characters defeated in combat may be knocked onto a moving belt for added jolliness, and stray ranged weaponry can strike the lever if it would help. Note that Frosties don’t care if they get mangled in the machinery, so they *like* to wrestle with PCs on the belts.

Radioactive Materials Storage: This room contains carefully-shielded containers of dangerous materials necessary for the construction of toy nukes, toy nuclear submarines, glow-in-the-dark watch hands, etc. There isn’t anything here that could *detonate* the stuff, but if you want to irradiate the PCs to give them random mutations and super-powers, here’s how.

Office (and Secret Passage): A set of creaky wooden stairs provides access to this office, suspended above the factory floor proper. Razbindle and Loopsie, two Elves loyal to Envious Santa, watch the factory from here. They have a red phone that provides a hotline to the fortress. The secret door the PCs want is here, too, beneath a filing cabinet, heading straight down. There’s a small storage room beneath the rest of the office.

Firing Range: There are a few Elves and Frosties here, practicing with Cane Sliver Rifles, testing new toy designs, and so on.

Catwalk Arrangement (Not Shown): There are several catwalks criss-crossing above the machinery and factory floor, with ladder access every 10 feet or so along every wall.



Kringlegard: The Terrible Fortress of St. Nick

The secret door opens to a shaft leading down, down, down into a damp, icy tunnel. The tunnel leads to the catacombs beneath Santa’s wicked fortress. The PCs enter directly *beneath* Area A, standing in an icy, damp tunnel with a metal grating over their heads. There are Frosty guards passing overhead every ten minutes or so – not very frequent at all, since Santa isn’t expecting trouble deep in the heart of his fortress. The PCs can find a way up through the welded bars and into wine and root cellar. The corridors through the castle areas are mostly of damp, flagged earth. Strings of lights and garland line the walls, as do fresh homemade popcorn strings. The major areas of Santa’s fortress are:

Root/Wine Cellar: Well-stocked. Santa seems to have a particular taste for Riesling.

Dungeons: A large prison complex. See *Lovely, Dark and Deep* (page 69) for what goes on here.

Skating Gymnasium: Used for battle-training and recreation. See *If You Should Go Skating* (page 70) if the PCs wander into this area.

Energy Shield Control Room: Very important. Elves control the deadly castle defenses from this and adjacent rooms. See *Pulling the Plug* (page 72).

Secret Christmas Lab/Library: Envious Santa himself often works alone here. See *Santa’s Sanctum* (page 74). There’s enough powerful Christmas Magic stuff here to restore Santa to jolliness – among other things.

The Great Hall: The Christmas “war room” and feasting hall, where a new enemy awaits. See *Reindeer Games* (page 74). Big things are likely to occur here.

Barracks & Residence: Where the in-house corps of Elves and Nutcrackers are billeted.

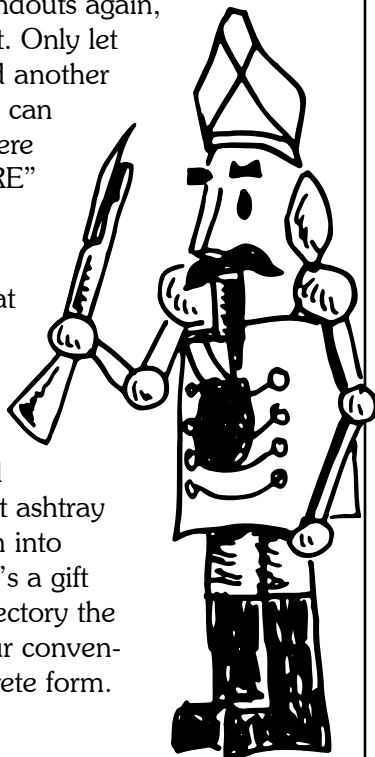
Executive Chambers: Sleeping and living areas for Santa himself, and his highest-ranking lieutenants and cronies.

Miscellaneous Areas: Used for miscellaneous, castle-ish things. Sitting rooms, food preparation, storage, and other workaday stuff.

The castle is enormous, and riddled with so many passageways, side-corridors, secret chambers, secret tunnels, and furniture that a group of Player Characters could – if they're *very* careful – get nearly anywhere in the fortress unseen and unheard. Let them explore *anywhere*; they can find balconies from which to spy, tapestries to hide behind, and so on until they actually start raising a ruckus. Then, things could become a *lot* more dangerous ... Give the PCs the run of the house, and refer to sections below for key locales and events.

- **Important and Useful:** Should the PCs ever conk out an Elf guard (Elves and Nutcrackers form the internal guard; there aren't many Frosties inside since Santa likes to keep the upper floors comfortably warm), they should find Santa's *loyalty test* (see the Player Handouts) folded in his vest pocket. This can provide a useful clue to the existence of Santa's secret study chambers, so it's best if the PCs find it *before* they get to the Energy Shield Control room.
- **Less Important But Equally Useful:** There are dozens of floors and thousands of chambers in Santa's fortress, but Santa's seen fit to provide basic shopping-mall style directories on parchments tacked at most corridor intersections. See the Player Handouts again, but don't let them *keep* it. Only let 'em see it when they find another marked intersection! You can point out, each time, where the little "YOU ARE HERE" arrow is pointing.

If they get any creative ideas about specific areas that the adventure doesn't mention, they're *probably right*. Like, if they say "I'll bet there's a gift shop! We could go to the gift shop and buy an ashtray, and with that ashtray we could put my Insane Plan into motion!" Sure enough, there's a gift shop on the massive text-directory the handout hints at but (for your convenience) doesn't nail into concrete form.



NUTCRACKERS

Description: These are seven-foot-tall wooden nutcrackers, complete with the sliding heads and clacking jaws and painted-on facial expressions. They have bristly glued-on beards and wooden toy rifles. The rifles don't work as ranged weapons, but the bayonets work just fine. The NutCrackers, like the Frosties, are almost robot-like in their behavior. Unlike Elves, they can't be engaged on the emotional or intellectual battlefield. They can only be fought, avoided, or tricked. Tricking them isn't too hard, though – they're even dumber than Frosties and have no real capacity for judgment. They'll simply ignore the PCs if they're not an obvious threat or trespasser (unfortunately, the PCs are obvious trespassers unless they duck out of sight).

Clichés: Robot Soldier (2). They can form grunt-squads to be more dangerous, though (limited to six dice regardless of size, since they lack any kind of usefully creative battle coordination).

Lovely, Dark and Deep

The dungeon complex is huge – row after row and block after block of tiny, cold cells, in which imprisoned Elves (and others) sit glumly on their bunks, playing mournful Christmas blues songs on toy harmonicas, whittling obscene images from soap, rattling bars with little tin cups, or just sitting, staring into darkness, hoping someone will send them a fruitcake or plum pudding with a steel file inside. Emotionless Nutcrackers stroll the corridors, clacking their wooden jaws in grim obedience to the New Christmas Order.

Each cell block contains 24 cells, and the Nutcracker walking that particular block carries the ring of keys. There's also an emergency lever hidden somewhere in the dungeon that throws open *all* the cell-doors at once. There are two important categories of prisoner that the PCs should be concerned about: Lumpkin and Everyone Else. "Everyone Else" doesn't sound very important right now, but observant PCs will notice otherwise given time, and if they don't, Lumpkin will tell them.

The PCs will likely *hear* Lumpkin before they see him. The Nutcrackers don't care what kind of noise the prisoners make, so Lumpkin – a very charismatic young Elf – is rousing a bunch of Elves, from his cell, with speeches of revolution. As grim NutCrackers march past, the Elves mock and jeer, encouraged by

LITTLE LUMPKIN

A handsome young Elf with a promising career ahead as both a candy maker and favorite playtime companion to Mrs. Claus. He's also got the kind of charisma that can rally the downtrodden and forge them into a force to be reckoned with.

Clichés: Friendly Confectioner (5), Leader of Men and Elves (4), Bedroom Athlete Hung Like a Mutant Caribou (6). If using the double-pump option, this last cliché is [3], instead, and Lumpkin never hesitates to pump it if Samantha wants it pumped.

Lumpkin's fiery words about the rise of the proletariat, Saint Crispin's Day, and giving him festivity or giving him death.

Since Samantha Claus expressed concern for Lumpkin's safety, the PCs are likely to want to rescue him. If they do, he'll be very grateful and useful to the group if they want him to tag along. If they *don't* ask him to do so, though, he'll want to escape through the catacombs to help Samantha organize the Rebellion for an uprising.

Lumpkin knows two things of special value. He'll be especially eager to tell the PCs that "Santa Claus ... Envy ... he isn't the boss around here. And that has him very upset, I think. I've heard him down the corridor, arguing fiercely with his dark master." Lumpkin will look a bit sheepish at the next part "... if I didn't know better, I'd swear the *voice* he was arguing with sounded a bit like that little Reindeer everybody used to pick on. I can't remember his name ... *Randolph!* ... or Adolph ... Gandalf?" he'll trail off in thought, the name stuck on the tip of his tongue.

Second, Lumpkin understands that he's not the *only* important prisoner to be shackled in the dungeons. It looks like the evil Santa Clauses were getting very busy *before* the PCs were on the case. Santa has already corrupted the timestream outrageously, by collecting Christmas "rivals" from throughout history. He's got everyone from the original (pre-canonized) Saint Nicholas (a kindly old Bishop well-versed in Turkish* politics) to the Star Man (a holiday icon from Poland) to Dun Che Lao Ren (China) to "Old Babushka," a magical old Russian woman who delivered gifts to children by throwing them at their heads. The list goes on, and includes assorted normal peo-

ple, too, like John Calcott Horsley, who invented the Christmas card, to Emily Bissell, who designed the first Christmas Seals. Santa has them all caged like beasts, locked away forever to strip Christmas of every non-Santa influence. The PCs have protected the *major* scores, but

these prisoners must still be returned to their proper place and time. Such a feat will require outrageous amounts of Christmas Magic.

If You Should Go Skating ...

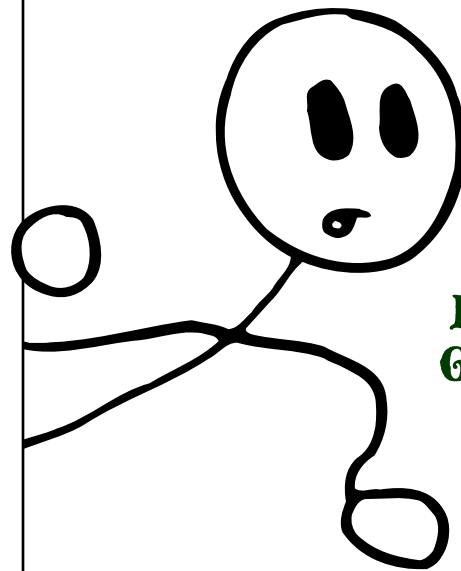
The skating gym is a large ice arena, about the size of a hockey court, used for recreation and combat training. At

either end (around where the goals would be if it *were* a hockey court) there are huge mounds of snow. Behind one mound, there's a half-dozen Elves. Behind the other, a half-dozen Nutcrackers. They're balling snowballs from the snow and pelting one another when the PCs peek in ...

It may strike the PCs as odd that the snowballs explode violently on impact. This "snow" is a magical, high-explosive frozen compound (non-toxic, peppermint flavored). The explosive becomes "primed" in snowball form, at which point it's as destructive as a weak, impact-triggered hand grenade. In huge mounds, it's safely inert, even when a snowball explodes against it.

If the PCs sneak in, they can observe the fight safely. If they draw any attention to themselves, that attention will arrive in snowball form. The PCs might

* Well, 4th-Century Lycian politics, anyway. The original St. Nick is the patron of sailors, young people, wanderers and adventurers. The PCs may be all of the above, and if so may wish to seek his autograph.



HAM! OR ... TURKEY? WINNING HEARTS! OR ... BUSTING HEADS?

Ah, the tyranny of festive choice!

There *should* be a method to the PCs madness, and to help them along, let there be a method to your own. This last portion of *A Kringle in Time* has a different structure than the earlier parts, to encourage multiple approaches to adventure's climax. In particular, there are four major possibilities explicitly provided for (and laid before the players as options to pursue), and clever/perverted/clueless players often invent others. There's no wrong answer; it's Christmas! But as the mighty Game Master, you may prefer to favor one approach or another in your presentation. For my own part, I recommend making them aware of as many possibilities as you can, and letting them take it from there.

Converting Santa: The PCs have already proven that the evil Santa Clauses have consciences; their experience with Greedy Santa established that these jolly menaces *aren't* pure Evil. If the PCs meet Lumpkin, they'll learn that Envious Santa resents and maybe fears his dark master. If the PCs meet Mandy, they'll learn that Santa still has a soft spot for the true meaning of Christmas, even though he's twisted by jealousy at the thought of people enjoying parts of the holiday that aren't him. Armed with either piece of knowledge, the PCs might conclude – and they'd be right – that Envy can be “defeated” without a fight. That's handy, since there's an even more dangerous entity calling the shots, and Santa has the power to undo the wrong if he could only be *motivated* to.

Just Nuke it and Run: The fortress contains enough destructive military and magical power to destroy itself and everyone in it. The PCs can learn this for certain by examining the controls for the castle defenses. If the players prefer to just whoop some ass in a big, destructive, sneaky way, they can set the entire complex to self-destruct. This presents three tactical challenges they'll need to overcome, though: they need to preserve Envy's corpse if possible for Mrs. Claus to use in her restoration ritual, they need to send the “historical” prisoners from the dungeons back to their proper place and time, and they need to get *clear* of the fortress before it takes the big nuclear belly flop to oblivion. All three are possible, but it'll be a bumpy ride.

A Slice of Fruitcake, A Blood Sacrifice, and Thou: Misapplied Christmas Magic got us into this mess, so occult-minded PCs may decide that more *properly* applied Christmas Magic could get us out. That's true, and they'll find the necessary tools in Santa's Sanctum if they're looking for them. This path is fraught with danger, though – there's no greater master of Christmas Magic than Santa Claus himself, and if he could screw it up, the PCs certainly can. On the other hand, magic gone wrong can be as hilarious as it is dangerous, and if you're in the mood to see a Godzilla-scaled reindeer battling a summoned Dread Cthistmas, it's a fine way to wrap things up.

The Boss-Level Approach: The PCs have several opportunities to gain allies to their cause, and to learn and exploit the weaknesses of the fortress (it seems to be fashioned of ice and pale gray stone, but it's built mainly of insecurity with a mortar of grandiose self-delusion). The PCs can rally the imprisoned Elves and Christmas icons to their cause, lower the Energy Shield to let the Rebellion in (not to mention a certain self-wetting toy tank, if they were nice to him), use Christmas Magic to summon occult assistance, and – if they're stealthy and clever – choose their own battlefield and rig it to their advantage. If they earn Santa's sympathy without actually converting him outright, they may find that he becomes a wild-card helper in the battle, as well. This provides both a “fallback plan” for the other solutions gone wrong, and a fun, direct-road approach in its own right.

be wise to just keep their heads low ... except they see something else, too. They see some Groovy
Boxed Text:

Some movement catches your eye in the shadowy gallery above the explosive snowball fight. There, in one of many ornate balconies, there's an enormous gingerbread throne on which a tiny girl sits, holding a toy nutcracker. She seems sad or frightened – it's hard to tell at this distance.

This is Mandy. She's locked in the balcony – the Elves are her “babysitters” today, and they tucked her away in one of the arena's box seats while they're busy engaging in recreational violence. Mandy is a “guest” of Santa Claus. In her case, being a guest is much like being a prisoner, minus living in the dungeons. If the PCs would like to meet her, they'll need to figure a way through (or around) her captors. If the PCs take the direct approach and engage the athletes in some sort of combat (the *fighty* kind or otherwise) treat each group as a Grunt Squad with Bunch of Elves Armed With Explosive Snowballs and Wiseass Remarks (5) and Bunch of Nutcrackers with Armed

MANDY

A nice little girl from somewhere in the American heartland. She just wants to get home to her Barbie dolls, her friends, and her parents. She even misses “her super-stinky brother Bert who’s just a big mean old stupid brat.”

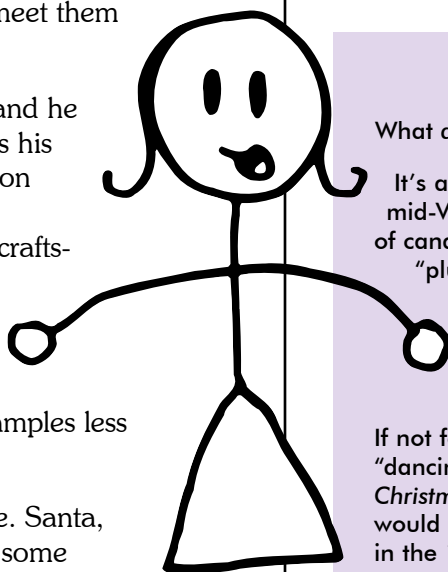
Clichés: Ordinary Kid (2), Latent Pyrokinetic (1)

with Explosive Snowballs and Unreadable Painted Facial Expressions (6), respectively (the Nutcrackers have been winning). If the PCs defeat either group, though, they can *take over one of the mounds of snow*. This shifts the balance of power (represent this by *halving* the other team’s dice immediately).

The PCs may also decide to stock up on snowballs. These make fun weapons, but they can be dangerous to carry around.

Mandy will be very, very glad to see normal people again. Barring that, she’ll be happy to meet the PCs. She’s also got a tale to tell. Tell it in your best sweet-little-girl-trapped-at-the-North-Pole voice; these are the key points:

- A year ago, Mandy had written a letter to Santa Claus telling him how much she had *always* wanted to visit him and his wife in their home at the North Pole. She loved Santa and his Elves, and it had been her dream to meet them in real life.
- Mandy’s letter touched Santa, and he brought Mandy north to witness his latest magic project: a conjuration that would instill pure, magical Christmas Joy directly into the craftsmanship of his Elves, making the toys more delightful, the food tastier, the games more memorable, the clothing more comfortable and the cologne samples less disappointing.
- Distilled Christmas Joy isn’t safe. Santa, Mandy says, had been reading some “very old and bad books” and made bargains with “bad people from long ago” in order to step up the schedule on the project.



- Mandy witnessed the post-explosion arrival of the multiple Santa Clauses, though she isn’t really old enough to understand what happened (grownups, of course, instinctively grasp the concept of being divided into iconic facets of pure sin).
- Santa told her she’d have to be “my little guest for a while longer, until we’ve got some things sorted out.” She says she sees Santa every few days ... and that he often seems very sad, as if he regrets what’s happening. She thinks Santa is really hurting inside, even though he seems mean.

Mandy wants very much to go home to her parents, but that’s probably not something the PCs can arrange immediately, which means Mandy is both a boon and a problem for them. They need to make sure she’s safe, so they should either take her along with them, hide her somewhere, or convince her to return to being a “guest” until the PCs help Santa get well again (if they mention that they want to *kill* Santa Claus, Mandy will *not* want to be around them, and she’ll run off into the castle on her own).

Pulling the Plug

The Energy Shield Control room is pretty straightforward – a high-ceilinged chamber filled with rows and banks of complicated machinery, and a pair of Elves named Drezboodle and Wimplesniggins.

GAMING IS EDUCATIONAL!

What are sugarplums, anyway?

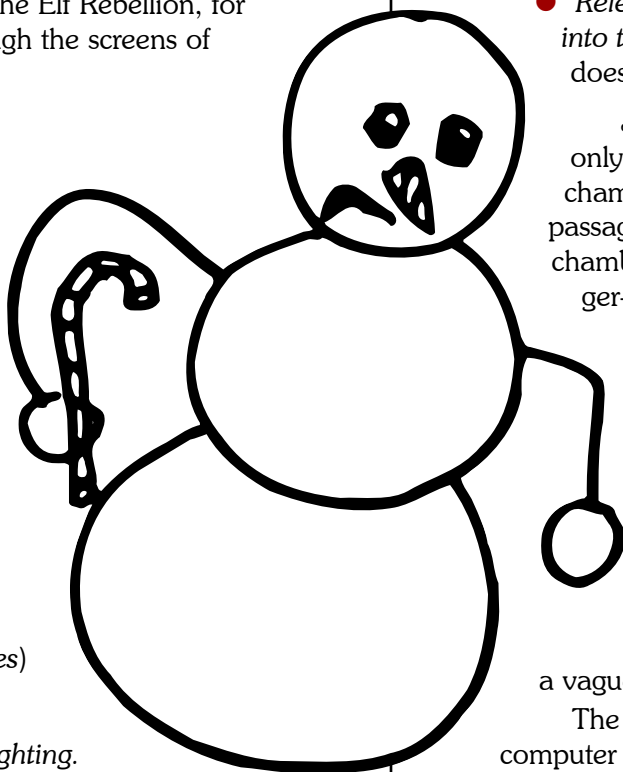
It’s an old word, dead and mostly gone by the mid-Victorian era, that can refer to any little lump of candy, but especially soft and round ones (hence “plum”). So, this Christmas (or next Valentine’s Day) when you’re poking through a sampler box and bite into one of those innocuous-seeming oval chocolates with a nasty pink center? Sugarplum.

If not for *Dance Of The Sugarplum Fairy* and that “dancing sugarplums” line in *’Twas The Night Before Christmas* (the only remaining common uses), it would have gone completely into obscurity sometime in the 19th century. Note also that, despite the implications of both the poem and the ballet, sugarplums (at least respectable sugarplums and the fairies who love them) do not dance. I checked.

They're cackling lunatics who love their jobs. They control not only the massive Energy Shield, but they also have access to other destructive and defensive devices (see below).

If the PCs are *really* nice and *really* good at lying, they might be able to convince Drezboodle and Wimplesniggins that their shift is over and that the PCs are the relief crew. If not, they're just two Elves ... dealing with them won't be difficult (though either can summon guards if given any reason to). With an appropriate Target Number roll against a tech-using cliché, PCs with access to the controls here can:

- *Deactivate the Energy Shields*, allowing anyone outside the fortress (Mrs. Claus, the Elite Reindeer Squad, and the Elf Rebellion, for example) to pass through the screens of annihilating energy.
- *Drain the Moats*. This process takes 10 minutes; there will be a little progress bar on the screen. If the PCs let the drain continue, somebody in the citadel will notice after 3 or 4 minutes of drainage. The moats may be drained individually (there are separate controls labeled *magma*, *acid* and *toy robot crocodiles*) or all together.
- *Activate Emergency Lighting*. This bathes the entire castle in deep red light and activates a warning klaxon.
- *Dispatch Squads of Elves and/or NutCrackers*. To any point in the fortress by reporting a false alarm to the security-dispatch system.
- *Lock/Unlock the Munitions Chambers*. These controls include a castle diagram showing where heavy explosives and other nastiness are stored in locked chambers throughout.



- *Program the Emergency Self-Destruct Sequence*, which will train the castle's weapon systems inward, ignite the stockpiles, and detonate a low-yield nuclear device just to make sure. Programming this sequence will require multiple rolls to defeat the system safeguards, and the system warns that "Destruction of this fortress voids all warranties. Are you sure? Y/N." The sequence kicks off a five-minute countdown and immediately activates the emergency lights and alarm.
- *Control the Jet Power and Temperature of the 136 Hot Tubs Scattered Throughout the Fortress*. Because an Elf needs to relax.
- *Release Novelty Football-Sized Hazelnuts into the Corridors*. Because a NutCracker does, too.

Just as important, this room hides the only normal passage to Santa's *secret* chamber, but Santa doesn't use the normal passage ... He enters through the secret chamber's fireplace using a variant of his finger-on-the-nose spell, slipping in as a wisp of sparkly magic easily mistaken for any other wisp of sparkly magic in a big magic castle full of sparkly magic, often in wisps. Most folks in the castle know that Santa's Sanctum is around here somewhere, but most don't know exactly where, or how to enter without using magic (Drezboodle has no idea, and Wimplesniggins has only a vague notion).

The secret door behind one of the old-style computer banks against the east wall (the kind with huge spinning tape-reels). The computer bank itself is a phony, but on the outside it has spinnies and blinkies just like the half-dozen others next to it. The odds of anyone noticing anything amiss is almost zero, *unless* they're deliberately looking for the secret chamber (if the PCs haven't yet seen a copy of the Loyalty Test, they won't have any reason to). Any group of PCs performing a deliberate search will find it (this particular computer bank has one *extra* toggle in a row of a dozen toggles that swings the door outward), but feel free to have them make some die-rolls before letting them do so.

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.

Rudolph Rein·Deer strides down the center of this massive chamber, looking very tiny against the backdrop of vaulted ceilings, the glossy green-marble floor, the magnificent throne, and heavy trestle tables weighed down with an unending Christmas feast.

It isn't just a trick of scale. Remember, on page 11, when Dasher explained that reindeer aren't tiny? Most reindeer aren't tiny. Rudolph Rein·Deer is tiny. Too tiny to pull a magic sleigh, which meant he was teased, endlessly, by Dasher and the others. Too tiny to impress Samantha, too, which meant when she was in the mood for some "reindeer games," Rudolph was just the towel boy, handycam operator, and fluffer.

I'm sure I mean he fluffed the towels. I'm fairly sure. Only Dancer would be willing to admit otherwise, and then only after a few drinks.

But Rudolph seemed outwardly festive and content. Santa was always kind to him, and to help little Rudolph feel involved, Santa invited him to be part of the team researching the applications of Christmas Joy in the laboratory that fateful night.

A very ancient spell went very wrong, and summoned some very bad, very old, very angry things.

At first, the most primal of these demons – a being called "Father Sin" by many – wanted to inhabit Santa Claus directly. Santa was flawed enough, and powerful enough, to make a sensible host.

But Rudolph! Rudolph *glowed* with inner hatred, with resentment, with self-loathing, with desire for vengeance, with confusion, with seething rage bub-

bling under a lid of respect for what Christmas stands for, even if the Christmas lifestyle had dealt him the short end of the antler. Santa had power, but there's more to villainy than power, and Father Sin made his choice: he would join with Rudolph, and give Santa over to his Seven Deadly Sons.

Now, little Rudolph's nose glows bright red, inhabited by the extracosmic evil of Father Sin. And as he strides, his tiny hooves click gently on the marble, but he *hears* thundering hoofbeats.

Rudolph is still tiny, but he feels gigantic.

Rudolph has no antlers to speak of, but in combat, he will *try to gore people with them*,

anyway, because he feels them there. He *knows* they're there. He's

loopy, I tell you.

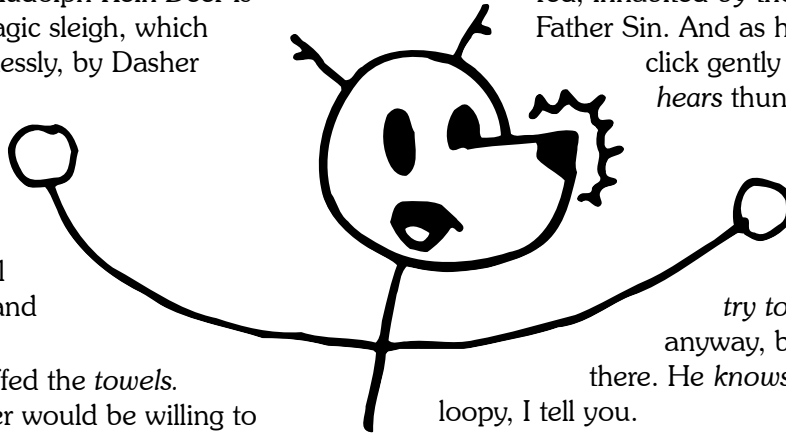
"So," the tiny reindeer says, his nose flaring bright red. "These are the meddlesome idiots whom Dasher and his pathetic team hired." If Santa's present, he'll turn to Santa and say "Are they not pathetic, Santa Claus?"

Santa nods and grins. "Whatever you say, kid. Whatever you say."

He'll say that no matter who's side he's on. Rudolph will be too busy speechifying to notice, anyway.

Some things to consider when whatever happens next starts happening (and then some things to consider when wrapping it up):

- There are a lot of NutCrackers here. They will obey either Santa Claus or Rudolph.
- There are a lot of Elves here. They still can't take Rudolph seriously and will obey Santa.
- There is one Frosty, sweating visibly and making a puddle on the floor. He'd really like to be excused and step outside where it's cold. Rudolph has been using him as a source of shaved ice for making cranberry daiquiris (see page 33), so there are visible scoop-marks in his midsection.
- There's plenty of food around. Food's fun in a fight.

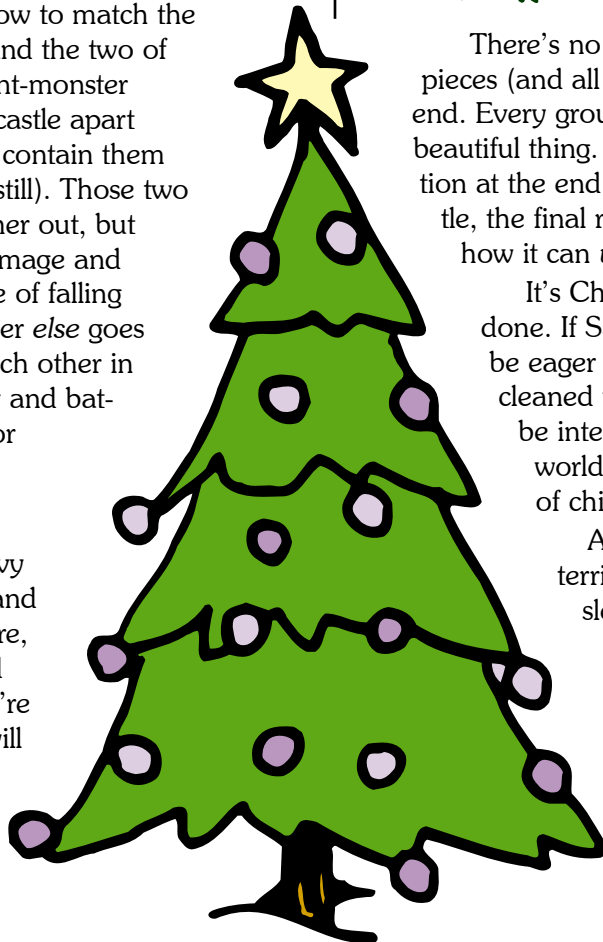


RUDOLPH REIN·DEER

Description: Rudolph was once an ordinary, peace-loving reindeer that the other reindeer really could have been nicer to. Then, he became possessed by a malignant spirit from the beginning of time during Santa's failed experiment, at which point his nose began to glow with demonic possession and typographer's bullet appeared mysteriously in the middle of his name.

Clichés: Living Embodiment of All Sin and Hatred (6), Pipsqueak Reindeer (2), Fluffer (5)

- If the moats are drained and the energy shields are down, the Elf Rebellion will arrive like the cavalry sometime in the middle of the action (whatever the action is). If the PCs were kind to Willie the toy tank, he'll bust through a wall, too, eager to help his friends.
- Rudolph will probably assume that Santa Claus is on his side whether he is or not. If Santa Claus isn't present (that is, if the PCs killed Santa in the secret lab), Rudolph will cockily assume that Santa will show up at any moment to help seal the doom of the PCs.
- Rudolph is up for plenty more speaking, and will, in particular, rant a bit about goring the PCs with his "magnificent antlers." This should make it very plain that he's a few bricks short of an igloo.
- If the PCs have read some of the occult scraps in the lab, and they decide to try to ritual implied there, they can, sure enough, summon up Dread Cthistmas to devour his ancient foe, Father Sin. Rudolph will grow to match the monster's height, though, and the two of them will have a titanic giant-monster fight that starts tearing the castle apart (the room is big enough to contain them both ... *if they're standing still*). Those two forces will cancel one another out, but cause extreme collateral damage and provide a dangerous source of falling rock and ice during whatever *else* goes on. The two will destroy each other in the end, leaving only a tiny and battered Rudolph Rein·Deer (or rather, reindeer) free from ancient evil (see below).
- If the PCs tried to bring Envy over to the good-guy side and didn't quite manage it before, they can try *again* here and now, and this time – if they're sincere – it'll work. Santa will switch sides in mid-fray if the PCs try hard enough to get him to.



- When Rudolph gets the fewmets kicked out of him, he'll return to normal size (if applicable) and start sobbing. He's his old self again, but his nose will forever glow as a reminder of the resentment he once harbored, and the evil it attracted. This experience has purged him of those resentments entirely; it's been very therapeutic.
- Mrs. Claus can, in fact, rejoin the Santa Clauses into a single, pure and Jolly old Elf, and she can do so *without* Envy being a corpse. It's a very sparkly ritual, and from it emerges the very real, very loving, larger-than life Santa Claus, whole and eager to get to work setting things aright.
- If the PCs somehow failed to save the Santa Corpses for the ritual, Mrs. Claus has one final trick up her sleeve – she can invest the power of Santa into another. She will ask one of the PCs to take the job.

Holly Jolly Dénouement

There's no way to know exactly how all the pieces (and all the PCs) will fall into place at the end. Every group does it differently, and that's a beautiful thing. We can, however, know the situation at the end of the final argument, the final battle, the final return to grace ... So this ending is how it can *usually* end. Adjust at need:

It's Christmas Eve. There is a *job* to be done. If Santa Claus is his old self again, he'll be eager to do it. The rest of this mess can be cleaned up in the morning ... Might the PCs be interested in coming along? There's a world full of children waiting. A world full of children Santa won't disappoint again.

An Elf runs up to report: "There's a terrible fog tonight, sir. And with the sleigh in banged-up shape, I'm not sure if you could safely navigate it. It seems to be some kind of last remnant of the lingering evil ..."

Little Rudolph looks hopefully at Santa Claus ...

You know, I'm sure, what Santa asks of him.

The End 

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ne had been rowing a small boat
toward the eastern end of Long Island.
Researchers at the institute declined
comment, citing legal entanglements.

Child Trouble At Keller's?

Arnold "Lefty" Goldblatt, manager
of Keller's department store on West
34th Street, has refused comment on a
bizarre series of complaints leveled
against his store's Santa Claus.

Like most major department
stores at the holidays, Keller's features
St. Nick appearances in order to draw
families into the store. According to
several concerned parents, Keller's
Santa is a "disturbing" man, who
would take to patting children on the
head repeatedly whenever they were
sat on his lap. When asked why he
patted children's heads, the Santa in
question (who's real name has not
been made available) replied "They
don't seem to mind it."

Goldblatt has expressed no inten-
tions to remove the offending Santa
from his employ, stating only "I've pat-
ted kids on the head before. When I
was a kid I liked it."

Several people have suggested that
a compromise could be reached by
giving the children hats to wear while
sitting on Santa's lap. Grace and Gene
Keller, the store's owners, could not be
reached for comment.

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Police Jail Crazed Giant After Fight

Two San Francisco policemen faced death yesterday in placing under arrest Carl Smith, 63, giant iron worker, who ran amuck in his weapon filled house at 624 Forty-fourth avenue.

Called by frantic neighbors, who reported Smith had spent Saturday afternoon shooting out his rear windows. Sergeant Charles Brown and Officer John McConville cautiously approached the house. Inside they could hear Smith snarling and cursing to himself.

He refused to open the door until the officers had coaxed him for several minutes, then pointed a huge revolver at Brown.

Officer McConville grappled with him and all three rolled on the floor. Disarmed, he escaped and found another loaded revolver. Again they grappled and this time he was handcuffed.

In the house they found four revolvers, two rifles, a shotgun and a large quantity of ammunition.

Holiday Savings at
**Nasty Little
Hobbies!**
Comics · Manga · Hobby Games · Collectibles
Ground Floor, Keller's Department Store Building
15% off any purchase*
**(over \$50, until Christmas)*

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Sunday Baseball R

PACIFIC COAST LEAGUE
FIRST GAMES

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Portland	2	7	3
San Diego	12	14	1
Seattle	1	7	2
Los Angeles	5	10	2
San Jose	4	12	0
San Antonio	2	9	1

	R.	H.	E.	
Washington	9	11	1	Brookl
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(First game)				
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Chicago	5	13	0	Cincin
Cleveland	3	8	0	Chicag
(First game)				

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

Bar-B-Q Feast!

You Need Christ ?

Everybody Needs Christ !

ADAM HAS CHRIST !!!

(Supplies Limited)

* * * * *

#1 Christ Basket: 5 Shekels

(w/Slaw & Shepherd Pie)

#2 Christ-On-A-Stick: 3 Shekels

#3 Jaweh Burger: 4 Shekels

Roman Wine: 1 Shekel cup, 8 Shekel pitcher

Fond of our Yahweh Burgers ???

Ask for the "Yahweh - All the Way"

for extra relish and mustard at no extra cost!

Holy Infant - So Tender and Mild!

The War Toy Valley Complex

SANTA CLAUS
LANE

ELF LABORER COTTAGES

RING OF WAREHOUSES



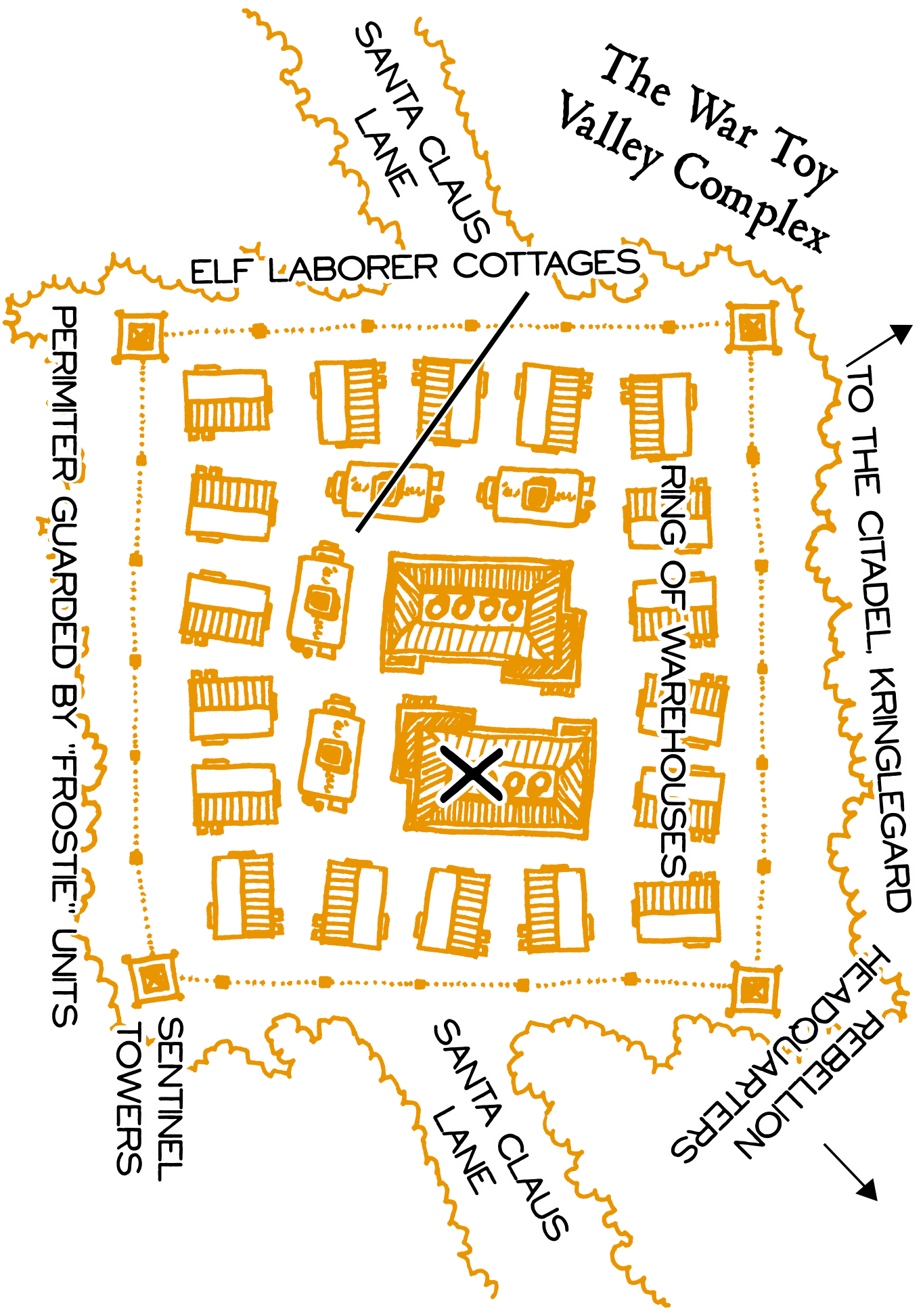
SANTA CLAUS
LANE

SENTINEL
TOWERS

PERIMETER GUARDED BY "FROSTIE" UNITS

TO THE CITADEL, KRINGLEGARD

REBELLION
HEADQUARTERS



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. *VMs we about this one - ask things.*
- 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:

Stuffing

Cranberry Sauce

Turkey

Douglas Fir

Mashed Potatoes

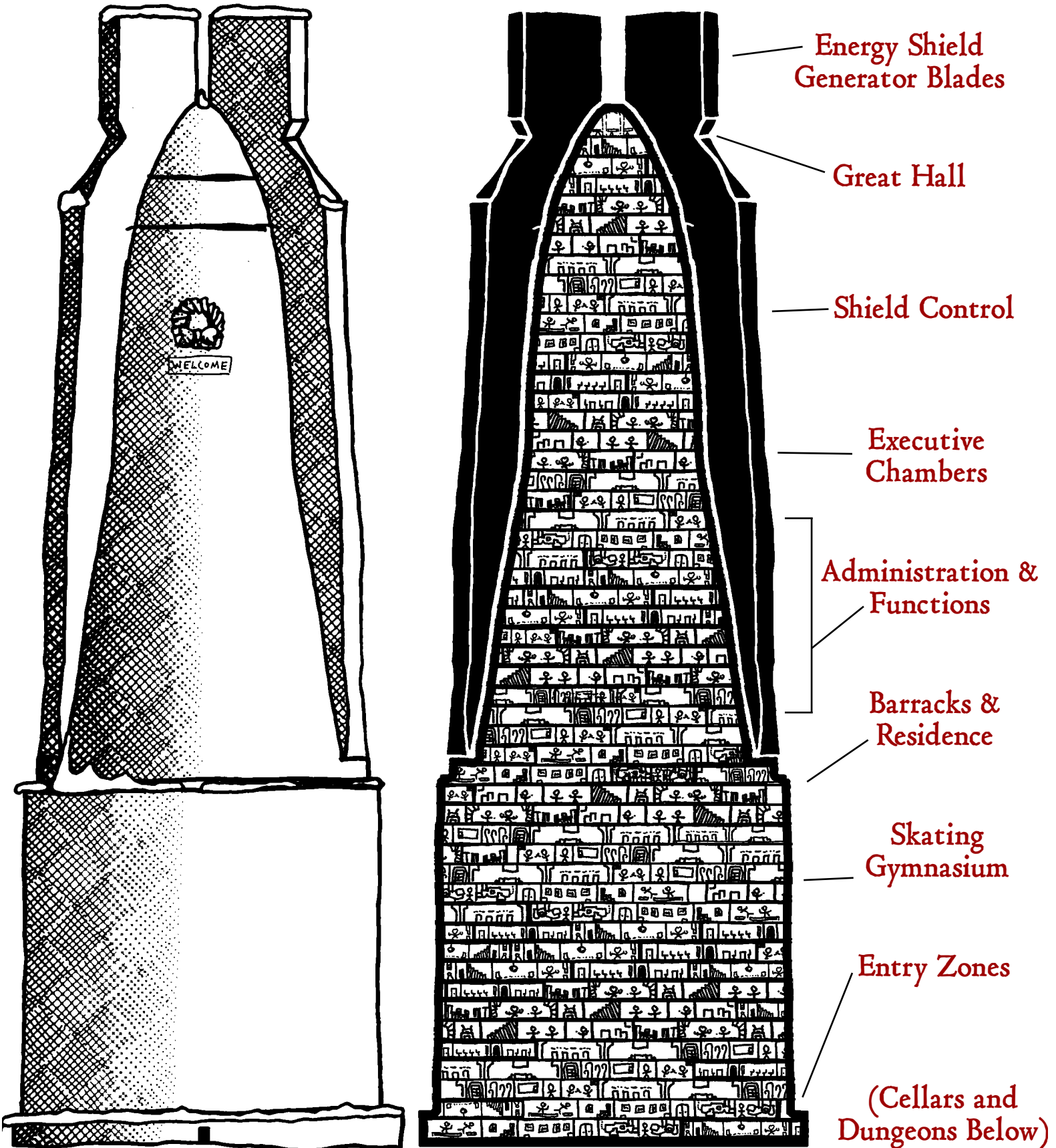
Gravy

Ham

Colorado Blue Spruce

To Turkey.

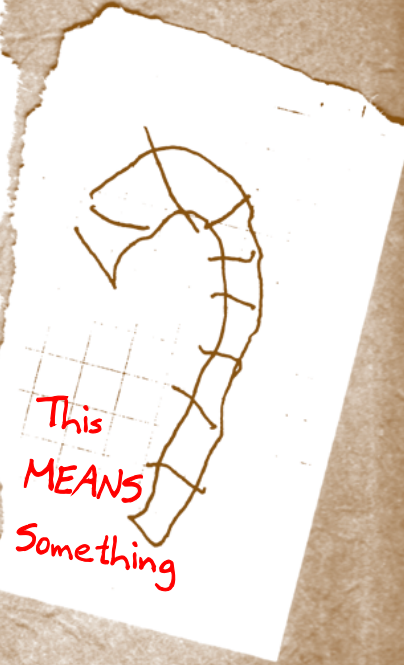
KringleGard: Citadel of Santa



Detailed Directory

Aardvark Ranching	7A & 9C-R	Leather Repair	3IX, 3IB
Abacus Storage	50F	Lecture Hall	26V
Abattoir/Theater	44G-J	Lederhosen Claims	IN, IP
Audio Recording/Studio	14T-N	Ledgers Library	10V

The elder tomes speak of another way to remove Father Sin. It is not banishment but an eldritch challenge by a similarly ancient being. Any of the vast demons from Beyond The World can be called upon to face Father Sin in battle, and if there is cosmic alignment, the two great beings will occupy and ultimately defeat one another, leaving this world safe until they are once again brought down by proud sorcerers too big-headed to fit into their tacky wizarding hats. The ritual is child's play; the summoner need merely stare Father Sin in the nose and shout out the name of the opposing demon. While shouting, the summoner must give up something precious to him, destroying it in clear sacrifice. The flaw in this "simple" method is that the entreaty may only be shouted to a vast demon that the summoner has already encountered. And so it is a cruel joke of dark magic, for who among us has encountered Dark Ctheaster and survived? Who has gazed upon Dread Cthistmas and escaped with his soul intact? Who has survived meeting the likes of Wild Ctharbor Day or Uspeakable Cthwanzaa?



It is folly to presume the spirits to be only evil, and inhuman. Indeed, they are nothing but a millennia-deep reflection of humanity, angled and concentrated into a briefer point in time. They bond in sympathy with mankind, and may be distracted and even undone by their own natures, and their human natures. They may also be beaten ~~shitless~~, owing to their physical, altogether human fragility.

NAUGHTY!

The writings of Sirsakk the Unrelentingly Parenthetical speak of a method (more of a technique) by which the greatest taste (which is to say Flavor) of roasted marshmallows (the large kind, on sticks) may be achieved in the intercosmic flames which will erupt when a demon the likes of Father Sin is defeated (but Sirsakk never defeated him, so how would he know?)

... I think we are doomed. None of us can summon one of the vast demons, and the Ritual of Twelve seems an impossible hope; we have only two Lords present and one of them can barely walk...

... To banish Father Sin, once he has been invited, is to banish one's own soul to eternal chaos, torment, and regret. There will also be quite an odor, that naught can get out, even with repeated scrubbing. For these reasons, the rituals of banishment are excluded from this tome, and those secrets will die with me. The bleak and selfish Father must be permitted or defeated. He cannot be simply dismissed, nor can his wretched sons...

The Kringle Kribsheet: NPCs By Chapter

Antonio: Fun-Loving Bartender (3), Businessman (1), Master Chef (1), Romeo (1), Wannabe Rock Star (1), Pervy Tree-Fancier (1) **1**

Maria: Fun-Loving Bartender (3), The One Around Here Who Can Actually Do Stuff (3), Every Drunkard's Bashful Crush (3)

Captain Dasher, Magic Reindeer: Christmas Icon (3), Action Hero (4), Beast of Burden (4)

Magic Reindeer (The Other Seven): Clichés: Christmas Icon (3), Beast of Burden (4), Big Fan of Dasher (3)

Philo Hackdream - Santa Hunter: Tireless Occult Investigator (2), Vampire-Hunter (1), Food-Service Lifer (3) **2**

Santa Drone: Mindless Servant (1), with a bonus-die weapon making them (2) dice foes. Grunt-squads theoretically unlimited.

Santa Claus: Magical Christmas Icon (6), Stud Muffin (4), Demonic Avatar of [Specific Sin] (3).

Keller's Department Store Security (Day Shift): Oblivious Rent-A-Cop (2). They can manage up to four dice as a squad.

Keller's Department Store Security (Night Shift): Entirely Oblivious Rent-A-Cop (1). If there's a ruckus that alerts a dozen of them at once, they can form large grunt squads worth as many as two dice, total.

Jacob Marley's Ghost: Ersatz Tortured Spirit (3), Financier (3) **3**

Dark Spawn of Shub-Tannenbaum: Hideously Fleshy and Festive Monster (3) and/or Grunt Squad (ranging from 6 to 10 dice).

Mint Monster: 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)

Dread Christmas: Elder Dark Sorcerer (6), Big Whoppin' Monster (6), Sh'nath Clough Gwyrth'lesh (3)

Tiny Tim: Pitiful Waif (3), Eldritch Sorcerer (6), Ukulele Player (1), Charismatic Cult Leader (3)

King Herod the Great: Roman Yes-Man (4), King (3), Civil Engineering Enthusiast (2), Barry Gibb (5), Frustrated Cartoonist Creator of "Zippy The Magic Bug" (1) **4**

Cranuloids from Planet Obulon: Arch-Eyebrowed Telepath (3), Members of an Advanced Alien Race (3)

Big Harley: Eccentric Baker (4), Ornery Jerusalem Redneck (4), Charismatic Cult Leader (2)

Big Adam: Eccentric Rib Chef (5), Vicious Madman (2) Charismatic Cult Leader (3)

Baby Jesus: Baby Jesus (6)

Christmas Elf: Jolly Toymaker (5), Natural-Born Adventurer (3), Christmas Caroler (3). **5**
Note: Some Elves also have the additional cliché, Dentistry (2); some loyal to Envious Santa Claus now have the Goose-Stepping Bullyboy (3) cliché, as well.

Mrs. Samantha Claus: Christmas Icon (2), Cat on a Hot Tin Roof (6), Resistance Leader (3)

Frosties: Mindless Servant (3). They can form grunt-squads worth up to 10 dice, total. *Special Weaknesses:* Anyone using fiery weapons (flamethrowers, napalm, phosphorous launchers, cigarette lighters, slices of warm toast) against a Frostie doubles the result of any combat rolls against the easily meltable fiends. Anyone removing a Frosty's silk hat will reduce it to a pile of lifeless snow.

Willie the Toy Tank: Childlike Implement of Destruction (4)

NutCrackers: Robot Soldier (2). They can form grunt-squads of up to six dice.

Little Lumpkin: Friendly Confectioner (5), Leader of Men and Elves (4), Bedroom Athlete Hung Like a Mutant Caribou (6). *If using the double-pump option, this last cliché is [3], instead, and Lumpkin never hesitates to pump it if Samantha wants it pumped.*

Mandy: Ordinary Kid (2), Latent Pyrokinetic (1)

Rudolph Rein•Deer: Living Embodiment of All Sin and Hatred (6), Pipsqueak Reindeer (2), Fluffer (5)

