

CHRISTMAS UNDER the DOG MOON



An Iggy, Yugo and Sam Adventure



CHRISTMAS UNDER THE DOG MOON

IGGY, YUGO AND SAM ADVENTURES

A Christmas Caroline
A Christmas Time Tale
Everyone Needs a Little Space at Christmas
A Christmas Mystery
Raiders of the Lost Christmas Cavern
The Last of the Snow Wolves
The Return of Leviticus Swyne
A Fairy Merry Christmas Tale
What's Past is Present
A Feast of Fools
Lucretia Alopeesha Takes a Vacation
Elves in Toyland
CD25: Christmas Day
The Treasure of the Claus
The Man in Sandy Clothes
Maggot, Lice and Worm
A Winter of Discontent
Ghosts of Christmas Future
Nightmare on Elf Street
The Fright Before Christmas
North Pole Stud
Here There Be Monsters
A Tale of Two Kidneys
What Are You Waiting For ... Christmas?
Freaky Christmasday
ELFolution
South to Alaska
Boys Will Be Boys
Murder at the North Pole
Christmas Night of the Evil Walking Living Dead
Iggy, Yugo and Sam in the War on Christmas
Iggy, Yugo and Sam Explain Everything
Died Hard
Sam Alone and Other Christmas Crackers
Iggy, Yugo and Sam and the Gelatinous Mass from Outer Space
Christmas: Boss Battle
The Naughtiest List
Stepping on Butterflies

THE NORTH POLE IS LIKE ANTARCTICA EXCEPT MORE NORTH



CHRISTMAS IN THE COURT OF HENRY II

Roland the Farter was, as his name suggests, a professional flatulist. Which is to say, he farted for money. It seems that a fellow who could fart at will made a good living in the twelfth century, and Roland did pretty well. He was given Hemingstone manor in Suffolk and 12 hectares of land in payment for his services as a jester for King Henry II.

Roland's act, performed at King Henry's Christmas feast each year was called "*unum saltum et siffletum et unum bumbulum.*" Roland would perform "one jump, one whistle, and one fart" in a short one-person symphony of bodily noises. The three-part show was part of the King's annual Christmas celebration, apparently serving as the grand finale to the overall holiday festivities.

There are those who say that the old ways are the best.

Those people would be wrong.

HOW THE GRINCH



ALMOST

Luke
Cage

STOLE SWEET CHRISTMAS!



In which Iggy hears a bell ring,
Yugo turns on the light, and
Sam eats some kippers.

And in which Iggy, Yugo and Sam save Christmas.

“Well, Christmas is going to the dogs
We'd rather have chew toys than Yule logs
And things aren't looking very good, it's true
So I'll just lay here and chew”

- The Eels, *Christmas is Going to the Dogs*

“Dr. Mortimer looked strangely at us for an instant, and his voice sank almost to a whisper as he answered.

‘Mr. Holmes, they were the footprints of a gigantic hound!’”

- Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Hound of the Baskervilles*

“Found my best friend at the old dog pound.”

- Sia, *Puppies are Forever (Not Just for Christmas)*

“Don't come around tonight
Well it's bound to take your life
There's a bad moon on the rise.”

- Creedance Clearwater Revival, *Bad Moon Rising*

A Tale of 'Citement and Ventures

CHRISTMAS UNDER THE DOG MOON

WELCOME TO THE NORTH POLE. LET US SET THE SCENE. It is three days before Christmas. All good Christmas stories begin about three days before Christmas. This one begins at the North Pole. It is neither calm nor bright at the North Pole this time of year. Indeed, the North Pole is just about the darkest place on Earth three days before Christmas. Nor is it calm. It is perhaps the busiest place on Earth. For three days before Christmas all the elves are working overtime trying to fill all the last minute orders before the big day.

Look around the workshop. Busy elves as far as the eye can see. Pick any elf you like. How about that one over there along the south wall. The one with the pointy nose. No, not the one with the moustache. The one beside him. Yes, that one.

That is Iggy. Tall, for an elf, with a pointed nose, pointed ears and unkept dark hair pointed in all directions. Always cheerful, always optimistic. Never worried about missing a deadline because missing a deadline is something that he simply would not do. It is just not his style.

See the one with the big bushy moustache at his side? That is Yugo. He is the clever and inventive one. Quick with a turn of the screw or a spot of glue. There is not an elf on the line who can build a toy train or race car or a 6.2 GHz video gaming system faster than Yugo.

Pay no mind to the elf next to Yugo. The heavy one with the curly brown hair. His head is on the work bench because he is sleeping. That is Sam. He never wanted to be an elf, but he was born that way and born to a life of building toys for Christmas whether he wanted to or not. And he did not want to.

The other thing Sam never wanted was a life of excitement and adventure. But when Christmas needs saving, who are you going to call?

This time, the call went to Iggy. His ElfPhone 13S is ringing now. His ringtone is the chorus of *Merry Christmas Everybody* by Slade. Let us give him a little privacy while he answers.

IGGY SET HIS ELFPHONE ON THE WORK BENCH. He turned to Yugo and Sam.

“That was Mrs. Wiggins.”

“Which one?” asked Yugo.

“Abigail Wiggins,” said Iggy.

“Which one?” asked Sam.

These were fair questions. It was only a year earlier that Iggy, Yugo and Sam had tumbled through a turbulent time travel journey where they had met any number of Mrs. Wiggins’, many of whom were also Abigails, Abbys and the odd Mabel.¹ The Wiggins family owned a public house called the *Moose and Pickle* in the sleepy English town of Beddleton. Iggy, Yugo and Sam had been there many times in many different times. And every time they stopped there, they met another Mrs. Wiggins. They had met this particular Mrs. Wiggins in 1961 and again in 1984. They had not seen her for almost a year. Or more than thirty years. Time travel is funny like that.

But that was another time. Or times. “This is our Mrs. Wiggins,” said Iggy. “The one who is right now, and she needs our help.”

¹ Has there ever been a Mabel who was not just a little bit odd?

Sam looked over at the clock on the south² wall of the workshop. “Can it wait? It’s almost lunch time.”

“It is 10:30 in the morning,” said Yugo.

“I know,” said Sam. “I’m starting to get a little peckish.”

“Lunch can wait, Sam, this is important,” said Iggy.

“Lunch is the most important meal of the day,” said Sam.

“I think that you mean breakfast,” said Yugo. “Breakfast is the most important meal of the day.”

“Breakfast is important. But so is lunch,” said Sam. “And dinner. And supper. And teatime. And brunch. They are all very important.”

“Can we just focus here?” asked Iggy.

“And elevenses.³ That is very important also,” said Sam.

Yugo interrupted. “What did Mrs. Wiggins say?”

“I am not entirely sure,” said Iggy. “She has a bit of an accent. But as best I can recall, she said ‘what ‘er, tair be hounds. Tair be hounds an fierce uns here in Beddleton Towne, hounds lick yer ne’er seen ‘em. Hounds fit to be guardin’ ter gates o’ Hades are runnin’ amock. Now, unless sommon does summin boot it, tar won’t be no Chrimmas, now you mark me words, Iggy. Mark me words. You an yer mates are steady blokes an good at sortin’ out muddles an’ I dare say we are in a right muddle right now an’ we all needs yer help right quick so jus say yull come then, aright? Oh, not now Herbert, ken yer see I’m onna dog n’ bone?⁴ Oy.’ And then the line went dead,” said Iggy.

“Oh no,” said Sam. “No no no no.”

“We have to help,” said Yugo.

² At the North Pole, every direction is south. Since the workshop was located at the North Pole, each of its walls was the south wall. This made fire drills difficult, as every elf was directed to the south exit which resulted in no little confusion.

³ Elevenses is a mid-morning snack or meal, typically taken at around 11:00 in the morning. In North America, it has been replaced by a coffee break, which happens at around 10:30. Many people consider morning coffee the most important part of their day.

⁴ Dog and bone is British slang for telephone. Even though they invented the English language, the British keep doing all that they can to make it incomprehensible.

Sam spun and glared at Yugo. “Did you hear all that? Between the oh blimeys and the faith and begorrahs, there was talk of monster dogs? Hell hounds?”

“I am sure they are all very good boys,” said Iggy.

“All dogs are,” said Yugo. “Except the girls.”

“But they are all very good girls,” said Iggy.

Yugo nodded. Sam shook his head and then lowered it into his hands.

“There are still three days until Christmas,” said Iggy. “Plenty of time to solve Mrs. Wiggins’ doggie problem.”

Sam looked up. “This is how it always starts, you know. Every time.”

“What do you mean.” Said Yugo.

“Three days before Christmas,” said Sam. “We should be here making toys and meeting deadlines, but instead we are going to go running around on some crazy mission to save Christmas.”

“Saving Christmas is very important,” said Iggy.

“The most important thing there is,” said Yugo.

Sam sighed. He knew that the argument had already been lost. No matter how important lunch was, it was going to have to wait.

EXCERPT OF A BROCHURE wrapped about an extra-large serving of fish and chips. © Beddleton Tourism Board, all rights reserved:

COME VISIT SCENIC
BEDDLETON

FOUNDED IN ROMAN TIMES, **BEDDLETON** IS THE
LITTLE TOWN WITH THE **BIG HISTORY**

BEDDLETON HAS SEEN A LOT IN ITS TIME:

FIRES PLAGUES PESTILENCE MORE PLAGUES

AND THE FIRST CHRISTMAS TREE IN ENGLAND!

COME SEE THE BIG BONFIRE ON CHRISTMAS EVE!

COME TASTE SOME GENUINE HOMEMADE FRUMENTY!

BEDDLETON! IT IS THE CURE FOR WHAT AILS YOU!*

*Unless what ails you is plague. If you contract plague while visiting Beddleton, please consult your physician immediately.

The extra-large serving of fish and chips was in Sam's hand. They had arrived in Beddleton in the late afternoon and Sam was already two or three meals behind. He finished up his fish and chips, crumpled up the brochure and wondered where he might be able to get a big steaming bowl of genuine homemade frumenty.

The elves answered Mrs. Wiggins' call as quickly as they could. They raced straight to the hanger where Yugo kept his snowmobile, stopping only briefly at the Sunkin' Punkin' Donuts Shop for Sam to gather some supplies for the road.

Yugo pulled the silk tarpaulin off the snowmobile, which glistened and gleamed in the soft light of the hangar. Yugo's snowmobile was unlike any other snowmobile in the world. It had a heated cabin mounted on thick tires with long silver spikes. It could travel across the snowy Arctic dunes as fast as the great sled driven by Santa Claus himself. And with the touch of a blue button

or the flick of a green switch, the snowmobile might launch itself into the sky or plumb the depths of the chilly Arctic Sea. Even Santa Claus and his reindeer team could not do that.

That was how the elves made their way to Beddleton that very afternoon. They flew there in the comfort of Yugo's remarkable snowmobile. Yugo brought the snowmobile to a lurching stop right in front of a fish and chips stand, where Sam had just crumpled his fish wrapping and was licking his fingers happily.

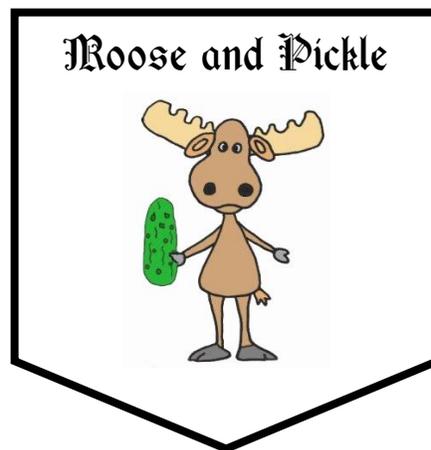
"Come on, Sam," said Iggy. "You had donuts, you had your chippies, can we get back to the reason we are here?"

Sam slurped his index finger. "If we must."

"We must," said Yugo.

"Where do we start?" asked Iggy.

"Right there," said Yugo. He pointed to a slightly lopsided brick building across the street. A faded wooden sign swung from a pole that stretched out over the door. It read:



"The good old *Moose and Pickle*." Sam rubbed his stomach with greasy fingers. "I bet I can get some of that genuine frumenty I read about here."

They walked up the uneven marble steps and through the heavy wooden doors. They entered a narrow dark hallway with framed pictures on the wall. They paused for a moment to look at an old black and white photo of a middle-aged woman and a trio of odd-looking children posed in front of a Christmas tree. Beside that was a signed picture of the Beatles.

A stout woman rushed up to them as they walked into the dining room at the end of the hall. Her wrinkled face broke into a big smile. "Iggy! It's you! Come quick, Herbert, Iggy and his mates are here!"

Mrs. Wiggins had changed since the last time the elves had seen her. She was nearly eighty years old, and her formerly red hair was died a soft blue and tied back in a long ponytail. She walked with a bit of a limp, but she still had the same bright blue eyes, lively and quick, and the same big smile she had when she was a teenager in Hamburg a year or sixty before.

Her husband Herbert came out from the kitchen and joined her. He was half a foot shorter than Mrs. Wiggins and had a fluffy grey beard that seemed to point in all directions. He wore round spectacles and was dressed in a faded brown cardigan with holes at the elbows.

Iggy took off his red velvet cap and bowed his head. Yugo looked around the room. It was an old building, with thick wooden beams that spanned the ceiling and supported by even thicker wooden beams spaced throughout the room. The wooden floor was a bit uneven and polished to gleaming lustre. The walls were covered with white plaster which had yellowed some over the untold years that the *Moose and Pickle* had stood on this spot.

Sam made his way to the nearest table and studied the menu. He stabbed his chubby index finger halfway down. "There it is. The daily special. A heaping bowl of frumenty, with a side of kippers. I think I'll have two. What are kippers, anyway?"⁵

Mrs. Wiggins toddled off to the kitchen while Iggy and Yugo joined Sam at his table. "How can you possibly be hungry?" asked Iggy. "You just ate."

"That was elevenses," said Sam. "Now it's lunch time."

"We came here to help out, not pig out," whispered Yugo.

"I'm not much help on an empty stomach," said Sam.

Mrs. Wiggins returned a few moments later with a big bowl of frumenty and two plates of kippers. She laid them in a row in front of Sam. Sam tucked the tablecloth into his collar and scooped a big spoonful of frumenty into his mouth.

Iggy looked away. Watching Sam eat could be unpleasant. He turned to Mrs. Wiggins. "On the telephone you mentioned you were having trouble with some dogs."

"Oh, my yes. Ferocious doggies. The whole town is overrun with them."

⁵ A kipper is a whole herring, which is a nasty, smelly, fish. The herring is sliced in half butterfly style from head to tail and then salted, pickled and smoked over an oak fire. It was a popular breakfast dish in England before and during the second world war. Kippers should not be confused with other salted smoked fish delicacies like bloaters and bucklings.

“It sounds like you need a dog catcher,” said Yugo. “We are Christmas elves. The only dogs we have at the North Pole are sled dogs.”

“They are all very good boys,” said Iggy.

“And good girls,” added Yugo.

“Catching dogs is not really our jam,” said Sam, between mouthfuls. “These kippers are the bomb, by the way. Can I get another?” He waved an empty plate in Mrs. Wiggins’ direction.

Iggy caught her by the elbow before Mrs. Wiggins could slowly retreat to the kitchen again. “The dogs, Mrs. Wiggins. What about the dogs?”

“Oh yes, the doggies. They’re everywhere. And there won’t be any Christmas if we don’t do something about it.”

“Saving Christmas is our jam,” said Sam as he wiped bits of kipper from his chin with the tablecloth.

“What have dogs got to do with Christmas?” asked Iggy.

“Well you see,” said Mrs. Wiggins. “They aren’t ordinary dogs. These are big dogs. Dogs as big as a man. And they only come out at night. And only at that time of the month.”

Iggy blushed.

Yugo spoke up to help his friend. “What time of the month do you mean?”

“This time of the month. When the moon is full. And for a day or two around then when the moon is extra gibbous,”⁶ said Mrs. Wiggins. “You know what they say, ‘when the moon is gibbous the dogs be wit’ us’.”

Sam shook his head. “I’ve never heard anyone say that. Now, about those kippers.”

“The kippers can wait, Sam,” said Iggy.

“The moon is in perigee⁷ this winter,” said Yugo. “The full moon will look bigger than usual.”

⁶ The moon is said to be ‘gibbous’ when it is when it is between the half and full moon phases. The moon will be ‘extra gibbous’ the day before and after the full moon.

⁷ The orbit of the moon about the Earth is not a perfect circle. It is elliptical, so sometimes it is closer to the Earth than at other times. When the moon is closest to the Earth it is said to be in perigee. If there is a full moon at the same time, it appears larger in the sky than usual and is often referred to as a ‘supermoon’.

“That’s what I’ve been telling you,” said Mrs. Wiggins. “The moon is extra gibbous this Christmas.”

“A wolf moon?” said Yugo. “That is what they used to call a full moon during the longest nights of the year. Right around Christmas time.”⁸

“All I’m saying is that if someone doesn’t do something about all these doggies then there is no way that Santa Claus is coming to Beddleton this Christmas,” said Mrs. Wiggins. “He’d be eaten alive.”

“Surely the townsfolk can help?” said Iggy.

“That’s the thing,” said Mrs. Wiggins. “There aren’t many townsfolk around when the doggies be about. Even me Herbert is no help. Always off with his mates when the moon is gibbous.”

“Then we need to do something about these doggies,” said Iggy.

“I do not think these are doggies,” said Yugo. “I think there is something else going on in Beddleton.”

“What do you think it is, Yugo?” asked Iggy.

“This does not seem like normal canine behavior to me,” he said. “The connection to the gibbous moon seems like lycanthropy. We could be dealing with werewolves.”

Iggy shook his head. “There is no such thing as werewolves.”

“Some people say there is no such thing as Santa Claus,” said Yugo. “Or Christmas elves, and yet here we are.”

“And a good thing too,” said Mrs. Wiggins. “I was telling me Herbert just this morning that I knew three blokes who could sort out these doggies in time for Christmas.”

“I’m sure we still have time for some more kippers, don’t we?” said Sam.

⁸ The ‘wolf moon’ actually happens in January, but that is close enough for this story.

THAT WAS HOW IGGY, YUGO AND SAM found themselves huddled in a copse of trees at the edge of town a little after midnight. The woods were well lit by the very gibbous moon that gleamed brightly above them.

“Do you really think that people can turn into dogs?” asked Iggy.

“There have been stories of werewolves for longer than there have been stories of Christmas,” said Yugo. “The ancient Greeks told of a tribe called the Neuri who all turned into wolves for a few days every year. Damarchus of Parhassia was believed to have lived as a wolf for ten whole years before returning to his human form.

“Werewolves appear throughout the writings of the Middle Ages. The ecclesiastical codes of old King Cnut forbid lycanthropy, or as he called it, ‘turnskins.’ The Vikings too, feared those who became wolves in the night. They even dressed in wolf skins to frighten their enemies, who might confuse them with what they called ‘beerwolves.’”

“Beerwolves,” said Sam. “That doesn’t sound so bad.”

“Even today, legends of werewolves are found in books and movies,” said Yugo. “In 1913, Hollywood released a silent picture called *The Wolfman*. There have been plenty since then.”

Sam nodded. “*Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein*.⁹ That’s one of my favourites. The wolfman is in that one. Very scary.”

“That is all well and good,” said Iggy. “But those are just stories. That does not mean that werewolves are real.”

“Most stories, most legends, are based on real things,” said Yugo. “Christmas elves know that better than most. Wolves are just big dogs after all. If someone can turn into a wolf when the moon is full, they could they not turn into a dog?”

“Maybe you are right,” said Iggy. “Do you think we will see one tonight?”

⁹ This is a real movie made by Universal Studios in 1948. The popular comedy duo of Bud Abbott and Lou Costello encounter most of the Universal movie monsters, including Frankenstein, Dracula, the Invisible Man and the Wolfman, played by Lon Chaney Jr, who had originated the role in *The Wolf Man* (1941). Hijinks and shenanigans ensue in what the American Film Institute ranks as number 56 on its list of The 100 Funniest American Movies. Lon Chaney Jr. is also referenced by name in the Warren Zevon hit, *Werewolves of London*, where is spotted walking with the Queen. His hair was perfect.

Yugo looked up at the moon, fat and gibbous. A wild animal howled nearby. “I do not see why not.”

“Did you bait the trap?” Iggy asked Sam.

“Bait?” said Sam. “What bait?”

“The kibble we brought from Mrs. Wiggins’ place. To bait the trap Yugo made.”

Yugo had spent the afternoon engineering a trap to humanely capture any dogs or wolves or werewolves, that they might encounter. Yugo reasoned if they could capture even one of them, he could study it and determine its true nature; whether dog or wolf or werewolf or something else entirely.

Yugo’s trap looked much like a large dog kennel, but unlike most large dog kennels, the sides were covered with rows of blinking lights, together with a series of cunning springs and gyroscopes, levers, wheels and pulleys, all designed to safely lure its prey into a soft comfortable compartment, with a pillowy mat on the floor and with a pair of bright green tennis balls, fresh from the can, on top. The whole apparatus was operated by a small computer that spoke with a soft feminine voice.

“This trap is not baited,” said a soft, feminine voice.

“Where is the bait?” asked Yugo.

Sam wiped some crumbs from his chin. “I thought those were snacks. For us. To get us through the night.”

“They were dog biscuits,” said Iggy.

“They didn’t taste like dog,” said Sam.

“Are there any left?” asked Yugo.

Sam burped. “Not as such.” He swept some biscuit crumbs from the front of his tunic and held them out to Iggy and Yugo.

“It seems that we do not have any bait,” said Yugo.

Iggy went pale. “That means that the only bait is us.”

THE DOGS CAME AT MIDNIGHT WHEN THE GIBBOUS MOON was at its brightest.

They were not wolves, but they were not really dogs, either. They had the aspect of terriers or retrievers but were much bigger than any terriers or retrievers the elves had ever seen, and they came out of the woods on their hind legs, howling all the while. Unlike most dogs, these ones wore clothes, or at least the tattered remnants of clothes.

“These are not dogs,” said Iggy.

“They are not men either,” said Yugo.

“And they are not good boys,” said Sam. “They are not good boys at all. They are very bad boys.”

A wild dog attack is a terrible thing, and a wild dog man attack is an even terribler thing. The dogs, or men, or whatever they were, set upon the elves with unspeakable ferocity, scratching, clawing, and biting as they came. The elves turned and ran but being elves, they only had short little legs and quick as they are, they could not outrun a grown dog, or a grown man, or a grown whatever they were running from.

There was no chance of escape, and Iggy and Sam fell to the ground, curled up and wrapped their arms around their heads. The dog men pounced, and would have used Iggy and Sam for chew toys if not for Yugo.

Indeed, all would have been lost if not for Yugo. For he hatched the cunning plan that saved them all. He reached into his tool belt and pulled out two tins of tennis balls. He peeled the lid of the first tin and the smell of fresh tennis balls filled the glade. The dog men turned at the sound of the opening of the tins and sniffed lustily.

“Wow, those tennis balls sure smell clean and fresh,” said Sam.

“They smell like technology,” said Iggy.

Yugo tipped the can and a single fluffy mint green tennis ball tumbled into his palm. He rolled it in his hand for a moment then gripped it tightly. He placed his fingers along the rubber seams, reached back and hurled it into the woods. He cried out, “fetch!”

The tennis ball arced out over the glade, curling with the vicious spin Yugo had put on the ball. It bounced at the edge of the woods and disappeared. The dogs turned and chased after it. Yugo pulled another fluffy green ball from the tin and threw it even higher and farther.

“Fetch!” he shouted, and he hurled a third ball into the air and then another. The dogs scattered in search of them, howling and barking as they went.

“Quick,” said Yugo. “Follow me.” He helped Iggy and Sam to their feet and led them to his little dog trap. He pressed a small remote control in his pocket and

the wire mesh door opened with a friendly . He motioned the others to get inside and then crawled in after them. It was a little cramped inside the dog trap, but the bedding was soft and fluffy and there were no giant dogs.

The dog men returned a short while later. Several of them carried tennis balls in their mouths. An older looking dog with a bushy grey muzzle and dressed in the remnants of a tattered brown sweater looked into the trap. It blinked a few times, then dropped a tennis ball near the trap door. It snuffled and then scampered off to join the others.

“There was something familiar about that dog,” said Iggy, but I cannot put my finger on it.”

“Whatever you do, don’t put your finger on that tennis ball,” said Sam. “It’s covered in dog man drool.”

IT WAS A COLD, CRAMPED NIGHT FOR THREE ELVES tangled up together in a compact dog trap.¹⁰ The sun shone down weakly through the trees. An unkindness of ravens¹¹ squawked at the first light, rousing the elves from their restless slumber.¹²

Iggy stretched his arms, at least as much as he was able to. One of his hands pressed up against Yugo’s face, the other dug into Sam’s buttocks.

“Easy, big fellow,” said Yugo. He gently pushed Iggy’s hand away from his face. Now both of Iggy’s hands dug into Sam’s buttocks. Yugo flipped a hidden

¹⁰ This is the first time in history that those seventeen words have ever been used in that order.

¹¹ The collective noun for ravens is an “unkindness.”

¹² Another historical first: these sixteen words have never been arranged in this order before.

switch and the wire mesh door to the wolf trap sprung open. The three elves tumbled out. Iggy shook his hands vigorously to get the Sam off of them.

“Hey, don’t move your hands,” said Sam. “They were keeping me warm.”

“Is everyone all right?” asked Iggy.

“I think so,” said Yugo. “But that was a close one.”

“We are going to need a bigger trap,” said Sam. “One with some blankets in it.”

“Hopefully the dogs will be in the trap next time and not us,” said Iggy.

“Sam is right. We are going to need a bigger trap,” said Yugo. “Those were some plus sized dog men.”

“We have some time,” said Iggy. “The moon will not be up again for hours.”

“It will be a full wolf moon tonight,” said Yugo. “We are going to need to be prepared.”

Sam pointed at Iggy. “Hey, what happened to your jacket?”

Iggy held up his arm. His red velvet jacket was torn, and the bottom half of his left sleeve was ripped into ribbons. “That cannot be right,” he said.

Yugo rushed over to inspect Iggy’s arm. “Did you get bitten in the fracas last night?”

Iggy shook his head. “That was not really a fracas. More like a kerfuffle.”

“Oh, that was more than a kerfuffle,” said Sam. “That was a full-on brouhaha.”

“It was a fracas,” said Yugo. He peered closely at Iggy’s arm. “You have been bitten.”

“It is nothing,” said Iggy. “It is just a scratch.” Iggy always looked on the bright side of things. Such an optimistic attitude also involves a good deal of denial.

“Scratches do not have teeth marks,” said Yugo.

“It is a little nick,” said Iggy. “No more than that.”

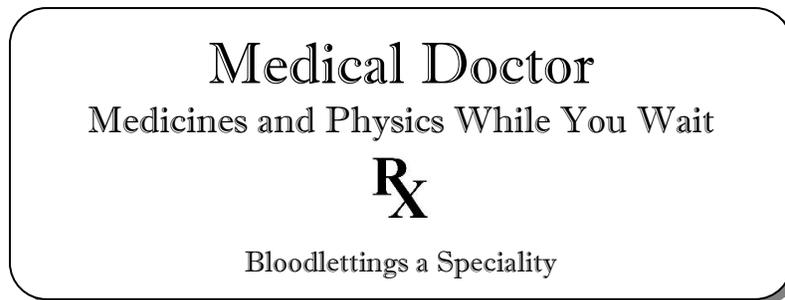
“We need to get you back to town,” said Yugo. “Before that gets infected. Or worse.”

THERE WAS A SURGERY¹³ IN TOWN, just a few doors down from the *Moose and Pickle*. Sam wanted to stop along the way for some more kippers, but Yugo said that Iggy could not wait and that the kippers could.

Sam grumbled under his breath. “Those kippers won’t be getting any fresher.”

“Look on the bright side, Sam,” said Iggy. “By the time we get back, they will be aged to perfection.” Sam just grumbled the rest of the way.

The surgery was in a small white house at the corner of the road. There was an old wooden sign above the door that read:



A frazzled nurse led Iggy, Yugo and Sam into an examination room and left them there. An hour passed and then another. Sam’s stomach growled. “I’m afraid that it’s kipper time,” he said. “How much longer do we have to wait?”

Not much longer as it turned out, for at that moment the doctor swept into the room. His hair was unkempt, and his white laboratory coat was stained and torn. A stethoscope with one earpiece missing hung at an odd angle from his neck.

“Sorry to keep you waiting. “I’m afraid I had rather a late-night last night.” He held out his hand. “Doctor Aloysious Rembrandt. You can call me Dr. Rembrandt. Now what seems to be the difficulty lads?”

Iggy held out his arm. “It is nothing really, Dr. Rembrandt.”

The doctor took Iggy’s arm in his hands and stared at it closely. “Now, I dare say, that is curious.” He sniffed Iggy’s injury and then gave it a soft lick. Then he smiled and wiggled his hips. He clapped a hand on Iggy’s back and said, “you were right, my little elf mate, nothing to worry about at all. I’ll have my nurse fix you up with a nice little unguent. Now you keep that clean and I will

¹³ In England, a doctor’s office is called a ‘surgery’.

see you later.” Dr. Rembrandt pointed a finger gun at Iggy, smiled, pulled the trigger and then stepped out of the room.

Iggy pulled the remnants of his sleeve down over his injured arm. “I told you it was nothing.”

“I have never seen a medical examination like that,” said Yugo.

“What an odd fellow,” said Sam.

“He seems to know his stuff,” said Iggy. “We should collect that unguent and then some kippers for our Sam. He has waited long enough.”

SAM WAS WORKING HIS WAY THROUGH HIS SECOND PLATE OF KIPPERS when Yugo rolled a blueprint across the table.

“Watch it,” said Sam. “You’re getting ink on my kippers.”

Yugo pulled back a corner of his blueprint. “These are the plans for our newer, bigger dogtrap. I call it the dog *man* trap. And a couple of other ideas that I am working on. If we get started now, we should have everything ready before the moon comes out tonight.”

“We had better get to work,” said Iggy. His injured arm was wrapped up in with gauze bandages. The unguent smelled like an old folk’s home. Iggy was sure that this meant that it was strong medicine, indeed.

“I haven’t finished my kippers yet,” said Sam. Mrs. Wiggins hurried up to the table and set another plate of kippers down in front of Sam.

“Hurry up, Sam,” said Yugo. “We do not have all day.”

Sam looked up. A fish tail dangled from his lips. “You can’t rush a good kipper.” Iggy closed his eyes and turned away so he did not have to see Sam slurp down the fish tail.

Twenty minutes later, the elves were hard at work in the yard behind the *Moose and Pickle* assembling Yugo’s new dog man trap. Iggy whistled Christmas carols while he worked. Elves are talented builders, and the dog man trap quickly took shape.

Herbert came by to bring them lunch; three orders of kippers in take out boxes. His sweater was rumpled and there were a few twigs tangled up on his sleeves. His thin white knees poked out through holes in his trousers. He yawned as he set out the takeout boxes. “Don’t mind me lads. I had rather a late night.”

Iggy, Yugo and Sam exchanged a look. Sam reached for his takeout box, but Yugo slapped his hand away.

“Those are not for you. Those are bait for the dog man trap.” Yugo held up one of the dripping kippers by the tail. “Kippers stink worse than old socks.” These will draw in all the men men from miles around.”

“That was my lunch!” said Sam.

Iggy passed him a carrot. “Try one of these. They are good for you.”

Sam wrinkled his nose and went back to work on the dog man trap.

THE SUN WAS GETTING REAL LOW when Yugo towed the dog man trap at the back of his snowmobile to the edge of the woods outside Beddleton. It was three times the size of the original trap, with reinforced walls made from solid home-made polystyrene. A spring-loaded wire cage door led closed on a roomy kennel large enough to house three dog men. Perhaps four of the smaller ones.

The kippers were laid out on a tray just inside the door. Sam tried to pinch one, but his chubby fingers were too thick to reach through Yugo’s specially designed bait guard. There would be no missing bait this time.

They positioned the dog man trap at the bottom of a large maple tree at the edge of a small clearing.

“The trap is baited and operational,” said a soft, feminine voice.

“We are all set then,” said Yugo. “When the big wolf moon comes out tonight, it will shine brightly into this clearing. Between that and the kibble, we will lure in all the dog men from miles around.

“Are you sure that is a good idea?” asked Sam. “There are only three of us.”

“That is right, Sam. So we will safely monitor all of the dog man activity from up in this tree.” Yugo set his hand on the trunk of the big maple tree behind the wolf man trap.

Sam’s face turned even whiter than usual. “You mean that we have to climb up that tree?”

“Oh, it will be as easy as pie,” said Iggy. “Look, the branches are lined up just like a ladder.” Iggy stepped onto the lowest branch and then began pulling himself up. Yugo followed right behind.

A big full moon slowly rose over the eastern horizon. It filled the clearing with an eerie glow.

“Hurry up Sam,” Yugo called down from high up in the maple tree. “The dog men are coming!”

Sam took a deep breath and stepped onto the lowest branch, just as Iggy and Yugo had done. It sagged under his weight but held firm. He placed his other foot onto the next branch, which sagged a little more.

“I think that this is high enough,” said Sam.

“You need to get higher than that,” said Yugo.

“Maybe I will just rest here for a bit,” said Sam.

Something howled in the distance.

Sam threw himself up the tree, climbing up two branches at a time. Each branch groaned as he set his red boot on it then snapped up like a whip when he stepped off. The whole tree shook with Sam’s upward velocity. He finally stopped and sat down on the branch next to Iggy and Yugo. They were perched high in the maple tree, with a view of the entire clearing, lit by the light of the rising wolf moon.

Before long a dog like creature appeared at the edge of the clearing. It was dressed in the ragged remnants of a plaid flannel shirt and blue jeans with holes at the knees. It looked a little like a border collie, but the sort of border collie that walked on its hind legs.

“I was thinking of getting myself a pair of jeans like that,” said Iggy.

“With holes in the knees?” asked Yugo.

“I hear it is more fashionable that way.”

The dog man sniffed the air and crept smoothly into the clearing. It walked on its hind legs but pawed the ground with its front limbs every few steps. Another dog man stepped into the opposite side of the clearing. It looked lean and quick, like a greyhound and appeared to be wearing a torn laboratory coat with the sleeves missing. The elves could not look away from its enormously muscled, hairy arms.

“I cannot stop staring at those arms,” said Iggy.

“They are something,” said Yugo.

“I wish that I had arms like that,” said Sam.

A third dog man entered the clearing. It sniffed the air and pawed the ground only a few feet from the wolf man trap.

“This is it,” said Yugo eagerly.

Iggy moaned. Then he let out a soft yip.

Yugo turned. “Are you all right, Iggy?”

Iggy clutched his bandaged forearm with his other hand. “I do not think that the unguent is working,” he said. Then he let out another soft yip.

His forearm began to swell and thick black hair sprung out through Iggy’s fingers. Then black fur appeared on his fingers. His fingernails grew and curled into fearsome looking claws. His arms grew thicker and thicker until they through his red velvet sleeves. His chest expanded and tore open the front of his coat.

Iggy’s nose, which was always pointy, grew even pointier and sprouted short black fur. His pointy ears extended and twitched menacingly. He threw back his head and howled at the glowing wolf moon.

“We need to get out of here,” said Sam.

“To the dog man trap!” shouted Yugo. The two elves scrambled down the tree, its branches snapping and whipping around them as they flew down. They reached the bottom and dove into the dog man trap. The door snapped shut behind them with a definitive **SLAM!**

Yugo and Sam looked out the wire cage door and saw Iggy bound into the clearing. Tattered red velvet fragments were wrapped around his hairy muscled torso. He was fully dog man now, or more accurately, fully dog elf. He looked pointed setter, with a pointed nose and sharply pointed ears. He sat back on his furry haunches and howled. The other dog men howled along with him.

Yugo pressed up against the wire door. “Iggy, can you hear me?”

Iggy the dog elf snapped his snout around. He peered into the dog man trap and sniffed hungrily.

“That’s a good boy,” said Sam.

Iggy made a flurry of sharp, loud barks and then ran off to join the other dog men. They barked and made quick feints at each other, then rolled around in the leaves. They ran around the clearing together, made quick turns and sudden stops and yipped and barked all the while. Then they ran off into the woods together and the night grew silent, calm and bright under the light of the wolf moon.

Sam shivered. "I told you we needed blankets in this thing."

"At least we have kippers," said Yugo.

NO THANKS," SAID YUGO. "I could not possibly eat another kipper."

Sam raised his chubby hand. "I'll have his."

Mrs. Wiggins set two plates of kippers in front of Sam. The two elves were back at their usual table at the *Moose and Pickle*, a little weary from their second night in a trap.

"We have to find Iggy," said Yugo.

Sam vaguely waved a forkful of kipper. "Now that the sun's up, I'm sure he will turn up on his own."

Yugo stroked his chin. "The light of the sun. Now there is an idea."

"I have an idea." Sam held up an empty plate. "More kippers please."

Yugo shook his head. "I suppose you are right. Iggy will be fine. Did you see how big his arms were?"

"I can't stop thinking about Iggy's arms," said Sam.

"Technically we are talking about his forelegs. That is the term for the arms or the front legs of a dog."

"I can't stop thinking about Iggy's forelegs then," said Sam.

Yugo looked up at the sound of the front door opening and slamming shut. "Speak of the devil."

Iggy stumbled into the room. His was his usual elfly self. His doggy aspect was gone. The scraps of his red and green tunic clung to him by threads. His hair was matted with clumps of dirt and leaves.

He flopped down into the chair next to Sam. He sniffed the air a few times and then picked up one of the kippers in his hand.

"Where have you been all night?" asked Sam.

Iggy bit into the kipper. “I do not know. All I can remember is running and yipping and the smells. Oh the smells. I could smell the woods and the night and the colours. Have you ever smelled the colour green, Sam?”

“I can’t say that I have.”

“It is marvellous. And then the sun came up. And I found myself out in the middle of the woods dressed like this.” Iggy raised his arms and what was left of his shredded shirt sleeves dangled below them. “I spent all morning trying to find my way back. I tried to sniff you two out, but I could not smell colours anymore. I could hardly smell anything anymore. So, I could not find your scent.”

“I am glad you found your way here,” said Yugo.

“I could smell the kippers, at least,” said Iggy. “That is what led me to you.”

“Do you remember anything at all?” asked Yugo.

“Just running and howling at the moon and the smells. All of the glorious smells,” said Iggy.

“We are no closer to sorting out this wild dog problem,” said Sam. “And today is Christmas Eve.”

“It is the last day of the gibbous moon,” said Yugo.

“You know who smells good?” said Sam. “Santa Claus, that’s who. He smells like Christmas cookies and peppermint. Those dog men will make short work of him if he shows his jolly face around this town tonight.”

Iggy closed his eyes and smiled. “Santa Claus does smell good.”

Sam looked over at Iggy and raised both his hands. “This is what I am talking about. Those dog men will sniff out our Santa Claus from a mile away.”

“We cannot let that happen,” said Yugo.

“That’s right. We need to save Christmas and it is going to be just the two of us,” said Sam. He pointed his thumb at Iggy. “We’re going to have to leave Mr. ‘green smells good’ here on the bench.”

Yugo pressed his fingers together. “Usually, Iggy is the one in charge of saving Christmas. Do you really think we can do it on our own? Without him?”

“We’re going to have to,” said Sam. “Look, you’ve got the brains. I’ve got the muscle.” Here Sam flexed a bicep to disappointing effect. “We’re an unstoppable Christmas saving machine.”

Yugo smiled. "Indeed, we are, old friend." He got up from his chair and made his way to the back door. He turned and said to Sam, "we have some work to do. Are you coming?"

Sam set down his fork and slid off his chair to join Yugo. Some things were more important than kippers.

YUGO LED SAM AROUND THE YARD AT THE BACK of the *Moose and Pickle*. "We are going to need another dog man trap. Maybe two. All of the parts you need are over there," he waved at a stack of sheet metal and used car parts. "I have something else that I need to work on."

Sam rolled up his shirt sleeves and picked up some parts. He was an elf and if there is one thing elves know how to do, it is building things. So, Sam set to work building dog man traps.

After a little while, Iggy wandered into the yard. He sniffed the air with his arms behind his back. "What is going on, guys?"

Yugo waved him over. "Hey Iggy. I have something for you." Iggy loped over to Yugo's side. Yugo ran his hand over Iggy's black hair. "Now that is a good boy," he said and then he quickly fastened a thick black dog collar around Iggy's neck.

Iggy stepped back and let out an unelfly yip. "What is this?"

"It is nothing," said Yugo, as he clipped a titanium chain to a metal loop on Iggy's collar.

"How rude," said Iggy.

"One can't be too careful," said Sam. "Safety first, as you always say."

Iggy rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "I do say that a lot."

Yugo gave a tug on the titanium chain. Iggy's head spun around. "I am just going to put this here." He looped the chain around a fence post and pulled it tight. "Safety first."

"I really need to stop saying that," said Iggy. He tugged on the chain but it did not budge.

By late afternoon, Sam had assembled two more dog man traps. He made a point of putting blankets in each one. He also adjusted the bait traps just enough to allow him to get a little snack if he got hungry later.

Yugo walked around the yard. He inspected the dog man traps and raised a pair of approving thumbs up. "Tonight is Christmas Eve. The last night of the gibbous moon. All of the dog men will be out tonight, and we are going to be ready."

Sam pressed a button on the side of one of the dog man traps. "This trap is locked and loaded," said a soft feminine voice.

"Let's roll," he said.

It took three trips in the snowmobile to haul all the dog man traps and other supplies out to the woods. They unloaded everything in their familiar clearing. They set the three dog man traps out in the middle of the clearing, where the gibbous moon would shine the brightest.

"If we can lure all the dog men here, and even capture a few, then Santa Claus should be able to get in and out of Beddleton without any trouble," said Yugo.

"This is your best plan ever," said Iggy. "How can I help?"

Yugo just smiled and then scratched Iggy on his head, just behind his ears. Iggy panted and wiggled his hips happily. "Sam and I have this job well in hand. But we cannot have you running off again." Yugo led Iggy by the chain attached to his dog collar to the big maple tree at the edge of the clearing. He looped the chain twice around the tree and then secured it in place with a small padlock.

"Do you think that will hold him?" asked Sam.

"It should," said Yugo. "That chain is made of pure titanium, the strongest metal in the world."¹⁴

"Sure, but did you see Iggy's arms last night?" asked Sam. "They were huge."

Yugo nodded. "I cannot stop thinking about Iggy's forelegs. But I do not think that even Iggy can break a titanium chain."

"I hope you're right," said Sam. He pointed to the eastern sky. "Look. Here comes the gibbous moon."

¹⁴ Tungsten is actually the hardest metal in the world. But titanium has the highest 'tensile strength' of any metal and is the hardest metal to pull apart. A titanium chain is a ponderous chain indeed.

The moon slowly rose above the clearing, fat and bright as a Christmas pudding. Thousands of miles away, Santa Claus had just left on his annual journey around the globe, his sled filled with gifts for the children of the world. In a few hours, he would arrive in Beddleton.

“Gird¹⁵ your loins,” said Yugo.

Sam tucked his green velvet shirt under his belt. “Loins girded.”

There was a howl in the distance. “They are coming,” said Yugo.

Sam adjusted his belt. “Loins are still girded.”

The gibbous moon rose above the trees and cast its ethereal lunar glow into the clearing. Iggy whined and pulled on his chain, but it held fast. He fell to his knees and whimpered.

“Hey Iggy,” said Yugo. He rubbed Iggy’s chin. “That is a good boy.”

Then the change took Iggy. It was a matter of moments. Hair sprouted all over his face and his arms and chest grew and burst through his new green jacket. His pointed nose extended into a proper doggy snout. He tilted his head back and called out to the gibbous moon. “Aaaaoooooohh.”

“Oh, that is definitely not good,” said Sam.

“It will be fine, Sam. The chain will hold.”

The chain did not hold. As Iggy took on his full pointed setter form, he turned and pulled on Yugo’s titanium chain. For a few moments it looked like the chain would indeed hold, but then Iggy’s enormous arms, or perhaps more properly, Iggy’s enormous forelegs, tore the titanium chain into pieces. Shattered silver links bounced about the clearing as Iggy broke free.

“Aaaaoooooohh!” Iggy howled at the gibbous moon.

A chorus of dogs howled back. “Aaaaoooooohh!”

“Aaaaoooooohh!” howled Iggy.

“Aaaaoooooohh!” howled the chorus of distant dogs.

¹⁵ Gird is a funny word, is it not? It means to encircle a person or a part of the body with a belt or band. In this sense, Iggy was girded by Yugo’s dog collar. It also means to prepare oneself for something difficult or challenging. When someone says gird your loins, they mean gird in the second sense, to prepare oneself for a challenge. However, the expression derives from the Bible (Proverbs 31:17) and originally alluded to the practice of tucking up the traditional long robe into a girdle (that is, a belt) so it will not hamper physical activity. So, when one girds their loins, they prepare for something and also belt up their clothes about their loins. Funny word, gird.

This went back and forth for a while. And then Iggy scampered on all fours across the clearing and disappeared into a gap in the trees on the far side, dragging what was left of his titanium chain behind him. The other dog men followed close behind.

“We have to catch them!” shouted Yugo.”

“Are you crazy?” said Sam. “We’re elves. We can’t go as fast as a dog.”

“You are right. We cannot keep up with Iggy and the dog men,” said Yugo. He pulled a key fob from his pocket and pressed a button. “But the snowmobile can.”

A horn honked. The headlights on Yugo’s snowmobile, which had been parked at the edge of the little clearing, flashed twice. Then the twenty-four-cylinder nuclear powered engine fired up with a heavy rumble. The snowmobile slowly rolled forward and came to a stop in front of Yugo and Sam. The doors on either side lifted up on smooth hydraulics.

“After you,” said Yugo, but Sam was already inside. Yugo slipped in behind the steering wheel and activated the dashboard computer. “Initiate tracking mode.”

“Tracking mode initiated,” said the snowmobile in a soft feminine voice.

Yugo turned to Sam. “Do you have anything of Iggy’s? Something that might smell like him?”

Sam shook his head and shrugged.

“Look in the back seat,” said Yugo.

Sam turned and felt around the back seat. He passed Yugo a half-eaten bag of potato chips and a pair of dirty socks.

“Is this Iggy’s stuff?” asked Yugo, holding the socks at a distance.

“No, that’s mine. Hold on.” Sam grunted and then passed up an empty pizza box, another sock, a slightly soiled handkerchief and a half dozen expired lottery tickets.

“Is this Iggy’s stuff?” Yugo asked again.

“Nope, still mine. Bear with me.” Sam continued to dig through the clutter he found in the back seat of the snowmobile. He found the crusts from a bologna sandwich, a red baseball cap with “Make the North Pole Great Again” written across the front in white letters, a couple of comic books, a white T-shirt with a mustard stain on the collar, and a few more lottery tickets.

“Still you?” asked Yugo.

“Still me,” said Sam. “Hold up, what do we have here?” He lifted up a battered brown wallet. He flipped it open and saw Iggy’s driving license. The black and white photo looked like a mug shot.

“That must be Iggy’s,” said Yugo.

“Yes,” said Sam. He flipped through the wallet and found fifty North Pole dollars. He pulled those out. “These are mine. You can have the rest.” He turned the wallet over to Yugo.

Yugo set it on the dashboard in front of his computer monitor. The screen lit up and a soft feminine voice said “tracking ... Iggy.”

“Here we go,” said Yugo. He gripped the steering wheel tightly as the snowmobile lurched forward and dashed into the gap in the woods where Iggy had disappeared only a few moments before. It bashed and dodged around the trees, branches slapping the windows as it raced through.

The passage through the trees grew increasingly narrow. Sam pulled his seatbelt a little tighter. “Are you sure this is safe?”

“Perfectly safe,” said Yugo. He pulled the steering wheel hard to the right and the snowmobile curled around a thick oak tree and then bounced over roots and rocks as it drove deeper into the forest.

A flash of silver, lit by the gibbous moon, appeared in front of them. “That is Iggy’s chain,” said Yugo. “We are closing in.”

Now the snowmobile was surrounded by big dogs, dressed in tattered clothes and racing along with Iggy through the woods. The snowmobile deflected off the side of a big tree with a spine jarring .

Yugo winced. “That is going to leave a mark,” he said.

Then the snowmobile scraped along the trunk of a big cedar tree. The side view mirror broke away and spun off into the woods.

“That is another mark,” said Yugo

“Oh, that is going to leave a big mark,” said Sam.

Tears welled in Yugo’s eyes. “I know Sam. I know.”

The snowmobile bashed off the side of another tree with enough force to crack the passenger window.

“That’s another mark just there, I think,” said Sam. The snowmobile crunkled as it bounced off of a large rock. “And another one.”

“That is fine, Sam,” said Yugo. “No need to keep telling me.”

“Extensive body damage detected,” said a soft feminine voice.

“Yes, I know. I know,” said Yugo. He wiped a tear from his cheek. The snowmobile bashed its way through some thick low branches. The other side view mirror broke free and hung from the side of the snowmobile by a few wires.

Yugo glared at Sam and raised his index finger. “Do not,” was all he said.

Sam did not.

The snowmobile trailed Iggy and the other dog men by only a few feet, but they could not be caught. They easily darted around trees, roots and boulders while the snowmobile bashed and banged its way through every one of them. Then they crashed right into a large, pointed rock. Yugo had to back up the snowmobile and then carefully drive around the rock, leaving a long scrape on the passenger door.

And then they reached the edge of the woods. Iggy and another dozen dog men stopped running as the snowmobile wheezed to a lurching halt. Smoke streamed out from under the trunk.

“Why did they stop?” asked Sam.

Yugo pointed through the spiderweb of cracks in the front windshield. “They are all gathering around that tree.”

“Let’s round them up then before they can cause any more trouble.” Sam pressed a black button on his door, and it slowly wheezed open on leaky hydraulics. It froze when halfway open and Sam had to push it the rest of the way.

Yugo’s door would not open at all, and he had to crawl across the snowmobile to follow Sam out of the passenger door.

The two elves found themselves beneath the biggest tree they had ever seen,¹⁶ an enormous redwood that rose nearly three hundred feet from the forest floor. Its trunk was at least 30 feet wide. It was, by every measure, a splendid tree.¹⁷

¹⁶ The tallest tree in the world is the *Hyperion*, located in the Redwood National and State Parks in California. It stands 115 metres (380 feet) tall. Certain magnificent trees are given names. The *Hyperion* is the tallest tree in the world. The most massive tree in the world is a giant sequoia known as the *General Sherman*. It is about 2500 years old and stands nearly 275 feet tall with a trunk over 100 feet wide. But these enormous trees are puny compared to *Pando*. *Pando* is a colony of 40,000 genetically identical aspen trees with a single interconnected root system. *Pando* is

“Why would Iggy come here?” asked Yugo.

Sam raised an eyebrow. “Oh, I don’t know. What do dogs do next to trees?”

Yugo took a few steps closer. “There is something at the bottom of the tree.”

“I hate to say I told you so,” said Sam. Then he corrected himself. “Oh, who am I kidding? I love saying I told you so. I. Told. You. So.”

Yugo peered over the crowd of dog men huddled around the tree trunk. “I do not think so, Sam.”

Then the Iggy dog broke away from the pack. He loped over to Yugo and Sam with something in his mouth. He dropped the object a few feet in front of them and then pushed it towards them with his snout. Yugo picked it up.

“What is it?” asked Sam.

Yugo held it up. It was a thick soup bone, wrapped in a red bow. “I think it is a Christmas present.”

Iggy barked happily. The other dog men began sharing other items under the tree with each other. There were more bones and quite a few tennis balls.

Yugo shouted happily. “It is a doggie Christmas!”

Indeed, it was. The dog men unwrapped their soup bones and their dog toys and yipped and barked and pounced and darted at each other. Then they all started howling together.

“That sounds like *Silent Night*,” said Sam. And so, it was. The dog men howled an old Christmas carol together.

“They really are good boys,” said Yugo.

“I don’t think Santa Claus is in much trouble after all,” said Sam.

The dog men finished their chorus and sat on their hind legs, tongues out and their tails flapping on the ground.

“Just stay right there,” said Yugo. “I have a Christmas treat for all of you.” He scampered back to the dented and battered snowmobile and pressed the latch

believed to be over 14,000 years old and spreads over a 108-acre patch in Utah. *Pando* is the largest living organism on Earth.

¹⁷ The elves did not know it, but this particular tree took root nearly two thousand years earlier, when a certain snowmobile travelled from the gold rush in California to a land the Romans called Brittania, where seedling fell from its wheel that bloomed in the woods outside Beddleton.

on the trunk. Nothing happened. He pressed it again. It creaked slightly but stayed shut. Yugo sighed and retrieved a crowbar from the back seat. He pried open the snowmobile's trunk and pulled out a stack of silver poles.

Yugo approached the excited dog men and set about unfolding and assembling his contraption. He clicked each piece into place and stepped back. He had built a silver tripod with a large lightbulb on the top.

"It's a lamp," said Sam. "You brought a lamp to a wild dog pack."

"This is no ordinary lamp," said Yugo. "This light bulb produces exactly the same spectrum of electromagnetic radiation as the sun itself. It projects infra-red, visible and ultraviolet light just like the sun does. I call it the 'sun light.'"

"Clever name," said Sam.

"You see Sam, when the sun comes up, the dog men become regular men, or elves again. With the sun light we can mimic that effect and block out the power of the gibbous moon."

"That'll never work," said Sam.

"There is only one way to find out," said Yugo. He tugged a small pull chain. The sun light powered up with loud hum. "*Fiat lux!*"¹⁸

Suddenly there was light, and the light was good. Where a moment before, the big redwood and the surrounding forest were lit by the soft gleam of the gibbous moon, they were now lit up like a bright summer afternoon by the brilliant glow of the sun light.

Sam looked up. The sun light was so powerful that the night sky turned blue, and the gibbous moon could no longer be seen at all.

The beam from the sun light swept across the glade and the effect on the dog men was immediate. Legs lengthened and snouts shortened and in less than a minute, where there had once been a pack of ferocious dogs dressed in tattered rags, there was now a group of dishevelled Beddleton townfolk, dressed in tattered rags.

Iggy stood up and stretched. His doggy aspect was gone, though he still had some dark whiskers on his chin and his nose looked a little pointier than usual. His arms were thin and spindly again. Scarcely worth thinking about at all. His red velvet pants had been reduced to dirty red shorts. His jacket was entirely gone, except for the cuffs which still encircled his wrists.

"What are we doing out in the woods?" he asked.

¹⁸ *Fiat lux* is a Latin expression that translates as 'let there be light.'

“You do not remember leading us to this tree?” asked Yugo.

Iggy shook his head. “I remember smelling the tree. It was wonderful.” He held up a hand to shade his eyes from the sun light. “That light is really bright. Can you turn it down a touch?”

“I think not,” said Yugo.

“Look, there is Herbert Wiggins,” said Sam. “I knew I had seen that doggo before.”

Herbert shuffled around at the edge of the group. His bushy grey beard was filled with leaves and twigs. He stood up slowly and drew what was left of his brown cardigan close around him.

“And there is Dr. Rembrandt,” said Yugo. He pointed at a thin man in a dirty lab coat. The Doctor looked back at Yugo and nodded.

“And look there,” said Iggy. “It is Mrs. Wiggins!”

“I guess they were not all dog men,” said Yugo. “There was at least one dog woman in the group.”

Sure enough, Mrs. Wiggins herself, dressed only in the remains of her apron walked up to the elves. She slapped Sam in the face.

“Here then, I’ll thank you not to be staring at a lady when she’s got naught to wear but her bare nothings.” Mrs. Wiggins pointed at Yugo. “And I’ll thank you to turn down that big noisy light of yours until I’m properly dressed.”

Sam rubbed his cheek. “I think I liked her better when she was a dog.”

Jingle bells rang faintly in the distance. Iggy sniffed the air and turned a pointed ear in that direction. “Do you hear what I hear?”

Neither Yugo nor Sam heard anything at first, but soon they could not mistake the faint chime of jingle bells ringing through the sky. The ringing grew louder until the woods were filled with the music of a hundred jingle bells.

A great, big sled came into view high above the trees, towed by a team of eight huge reindeer. It circled around the giant redwood two or three times as it slowly descended and then skidded to a gentle stop right in front of the elves.

The sled was enormous. It rose thirty feet high from runner to the top of the great sack in the back. A big man in a red fur coat and hat jumped down from his seat near the top. He chuckled. “Ho ho ho.”

“What are you doing here, Santa Claus?” asked Iggy.

“I was passing by on my rounds when I something on the ground as bright as the Christmas Star, dancing in the night. So, I rushed down to see what was the matter. I should have expected the three of you would have something to do with it.”

Santa walked over and rested his hand on the wrinkled trunk of the giant redwood tree. “Good to see you again *Old Fernanda*.”

“*Old Fernanda*?” asked Yugo.

“That’s her name,” said Santa Claus. “All magnificent trees have names. And she is magnificent, isn’t she? *Old Fernanda* has been guiding my way into Beddleton for centuries.”

“Well, as you can see, we have it all sorted down here,” said Sam. “Dog men cured; Christmas saved.” He paused and then added, “you’re welcome.”

“It looks like there is a little Christmas to attend to before I get on my way,” said Santa Claus. He looked over at the bedraggled Beddleton townsfolk dressed only in scraps and rags. He climbed back onto his sled and reached into the enormous sack in the back. He pulled a few packages out and threw them down to Iggy, Yugo and Sam. “Pass these around for me, will you.”

The elves shared the parcels with the bemused former dog people. Herbert unwrapped his and pulled out a bright red and green Christmas sweater and a pair of boxer shorts with pine trees on them.

“I always keep extra sets of clean underpants in the sack. You never know when you might need some clean underpants,” said Santa Claus. He passed the last package to Iggy. “This should keep you warm.”

Iggy ripped open the package and found his own colourful Christmas sweater. It was blue and white with the words **‘Elves Are Doing It For Themselves’** written across the front in yellow sequins. He tugged it on over what was left of his old torn jacket.

“It fits perfectly!” he said.

“Of course, it does. I’m Santa Claus.” He leapt back onto his sled and gripped the reins. “It looks like my work here is done. I’ll be on my way.” He snapped the reins and with a hearty Ho Ho Ho! rocketed away in a puff of snow.

“Wait!” shouted Yugo. “Do not leave us behind!” But it was too late. Santa Claus was miles away. All that was left was the faint echo of jingle bells.

“What is the problem, Yugo,” asked Iggy.

Yugo looked over at the broken-down snowmobile which rested at an odd angle with steam leaking out from under the hood. “How are we going to get home?”

CHRISTMAS AT THE *MOOSE AND PICKLE*. It was a traditional Beddleton Christmas supper with all the fixings: Roast goose with stuffing and cranberry sauce fresh from the can. Heaps of mashed potatoes, braised cabbage and pureed parsnips, all drenched in gravy. Yorkshire puddings, Christmas puddings, sticky puddings and figgy puddings. Pigs in blankets and toads in holes. For dessert, spotted dick and mince pie topped with squirty cream.¹⁹

And an extra plate of kippers for Sam.

There were Christmas crackers beside every plate. The elves cracked theirs, and then dug inside to retrieve small toys, terrible jokes and tissue paper hats. There was a yo-yo for Iggy, a magnifying glass for Yugo and a thimble for Sam. Sam threw the thimble over his shoulder and broke open another cracker. This time he got a pair of trick dice that always rolled a seven and he was happy with that.

Herbert and Abigail Wiggins dashed about the room, serving the elves and all their guests and dressed in matching festive Christmas sweaters with dogs in Santa Claus hats on the front.

Herbert had towed the snowmobile back into town. It was parked behind the tavern under a red and green tarpaulin to protect it from the snow. It would be weeks before Yugo would be able to finish repairing all the damage from their chatic ride through the woods.

Until then, Iggy and Sam were happy to help out at the *Moose and Pickle*. There were always things to fix in a thousand-year-old public house and Iggy and Sam were handy indeed.

But tonight was Christmas night, a night for feasting and celebrating with all the new friends they had made in Beddleton, many of whom were at the *Moose and Pickle* too.

It was a very merry Christmas for the townsfolk of Beddleton and for elves and dogs alike.

¹⁹ In England, whipped cream that is squirted from a can is known as 'squirty cream.'



To wit: →

Iggy, Yugo and Sam Will Return In:

The Loneliest Fruitcake

or

The Twelve Dogs of Christmas

or

An Unexpected Gurney

or

The Hound of the Joneses

or

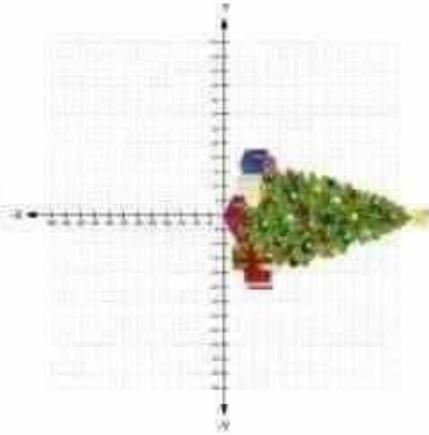
Iggy, Yugo and Sam: No Way Home

or

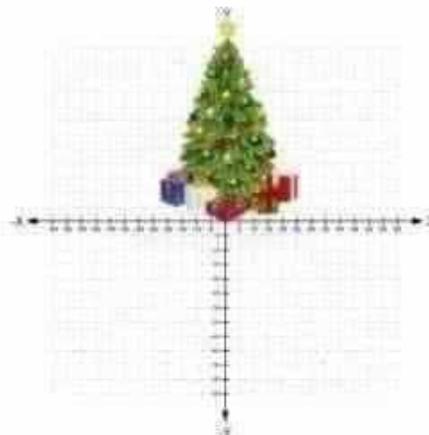
Something Else Entirely

YUGO EXPLAINS XMAS TREES

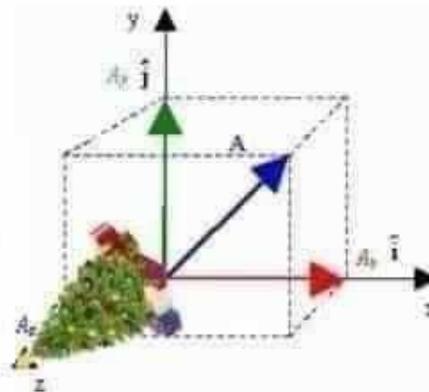
Xmas Tree



Ymas Tree



Zmas Tree



DR. ALOYSIUS REMBRANDT WAS HARD AT WORK IN HIS SURGERY in downtown Beddleton. He wore a new white lab coat on top of a colourful Christmas sweater that said **Doctors Do It With Patients** on the front.

He added some powder into a stone mortar and crushed it with his pestle into paste. Then he scooped some of the mixture up with a spatula.

“They all laughed at me when I said I could turn men into dogs. But who is laughing now?”

The patient on the examining table shook his head.

“That’s right. Nobody is laughing now. Nobody that matters, anyway.” Dr. Rembrandt came closer and rubbed the paste onto his patient’s cheeks and chin.

“But this new unguent is my greatest physic yet. The most potent of my potions. Dog men were just an amusement. What will they say when they find a town full of something even more wondrous? It will be a Nobel Prize for a start. Money, fame. Infamy even. A place in the history books.

The patient on the examination table just nodded.

“Now tell me, my friend, what will they all say when they find a town full of *frog-men*?”

Herbert Wiggins looked up from the examination table and said, “ribbit.”



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Christmas is going to the dogs.

An urgent telephone call brings the elves back to Beddleton, where they will have to deal with ferocious hounds, a strange physician and kippers.

When the gibbous moon rises, it will take more than dog biscuits to save Christmas.

Advance praise for

CHRISTMAS UNDER the DOG MOON

• *The author wrongly implies there are bad dogs. There are no bad dogs, only bad owners. Now who wants to go for walkies?*

- Barbara Woodhouse (Author of 'No Bad Dogs', etc'd)

• *This story would have been better if it had some cats in it.*

- Selina Kyle

• *There is very little about this story that I liked, however the dog trap with the computer inside it was wicked cool.*

- Dr. James Redcliffe, PhD., age 22

• *If I'd known it was this cold, darling, I'd have grabbed two more puppies and made mittens.*

- Cruella De Vil

