

Peril Of the
Ruined PIE

IGGY, YUGO AND SAM ADVENTURES

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



NicholasG

@Dad_At_Law



When my daughter was 7 years-old she once interrupted a bedtime story to tell me, “In a pie-eating contest, it doesn’t matter if you win or lose because you get to eat pie.” I think about that a lot.



This might be a Christmas story, but it is not for snowflakes.

This story abounds with offensive and triggering content. Among the many things that might offend, the following offences are the most offensive of all:

- There is a morbidly obese character who is repeatedly fat-shamed for laughs
- There is ageist content as it relates to a 1000 year old woman
- The old lady gets body shamed for laughs as well
- The word “witch” is thrown around unnecessarily on several occasions
- There is nudity. Actual elf nudity. It is not pretty.

There is really no excuse for any of this. But you have been warned.

In which Iggy takes care to prevent sunburn,
Yugo eats a taco, and
Sam suffers terribly before it is all over.

And in which Iggy, Yugo and Sam do not even save Christmas.

“I stick my tongue out and lick my nose
Tuck my shirt in and zip my fly
Go ahead, have a vision
I'm the man on the flaming pie”

- Paul McCartney, *Flaming Pie*

“Will you stop by for a piece of delicious
Peach pie while I tell you my yuletide wishes?
You can help me do the dishes
'Cause here it is, Christmastime”

- Kevin Bacon and the Old 97's, *Here it is Christmastime*

“What the heck's a turtle dove?”

- The Old 97's, *Christmastime is here*

A Tale of 'Citement and Ventures

PEPPERMINT PLUM PIE:

Ingredients

- 3 cups all-purpose flour
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup white sugar
- 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoons baking powder
- $\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon salt
- $\frac{2}{3}$ cup butter
- 2 puffin's eggs
- 1 teaspoon witch hazel
- 3 tablespoons walrus milk
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon herb of mandrake
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup brown sugar plums
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon nightshade
- $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon salt
- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup chopped hazelnuts
- 3 tablespoons butter
- 5 cups peppermint plums, pitted and sliced
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon ground nutmeg
- 1 dollop Olde Elf's Whisky

Directions

1. Build fire in oven to 375 degrees F (190 degrees C).
2. Crust: In a large bowl combine 3 cups flour, $\frac{3}{4}$ cups white sugar, baking powder, and $\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon salt. Mix thoroughly, then cut in $\frac{2}{3}$ cup butter with a pastry blender, until pieces are the size of small peas. Stir in puffin's eggs, mandrake, walrus milk and witch hazel. Mix just until all ingredients are combined. Allow dough to rest in refrigerator.
3. Place pitted and sliced peppermint plums in a large bowl. In a small bowl, mix remaining sugar plums, flour, cinnamon, and nutmeg until thoroughly combined. Pour over fruit and stir gently until all fruit is evenly coated.
4. Roll out pie crust into two large circles and place one in a 9-inch pie pan. Trim and flute edges, then pour in peppermint plum filling.
5. Slice the second pastry circle into strips and weave them into a lattice pattern over the fruit filling.
6. Bake for 45 to 55 minutes. Let rest on the window sill, then serve warm.

Peril Of the Purloined Pie

Closing Time at the Walrus and Ulu

THE BEST TRAVEL GUIDES IN THE WORLD ARE published by the Wiggins Binding Company of Garland Grove, California. Every Edition of the *Wiggins' Guide to the North Pole* published since 1994 lists the *Walrus and Ulu* as the best elf pub north of the Arctic Circle. The latest edition describes the Walrus and Ulu in the following terms:

Nestled amidst the pristine beauty of the polar wilderness, the *Walrus and Ulu* is a heartwarming oasis at the northernmost reaches of the world. This charming establishment offers a unique and unforgettable experience to the intrepid northern traveler. As you step inside, you are greeted by an enormous Walrus sculpture, built entirely of Lego™. Softly glowing lanterns and a kayak hang from rustic wooden beams creating a unique yet refined ambiance. The skilled chefs expertly blend traditional recipes with modern twists. The puffin pie is a particular delight. The pub's well-stocked bar features an impressive menu of Arctic-inspired cocktails, including the "Aurora Borealis", with its ethereal green glow and "North Star Punch" which packs a punch of its own. ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

This "heartwarming oasis at the northernmost reaches of the world" is where Iggy, Yugo and Sam are to be found most nights after their shift at the toy building workshop. They usually sit at the same table, at the end of the bar, not too far from the men's washroom.

Iggy, Yugo and Sam are not, however “intrepid northern travelers.” They are elves who live at the North Pole. Making toys is their business and in late December, business is good.

Iggy is the tallest of the three, though no one who is not an elf would think of him as particularly tall. He has a thin face, dark eyes and a long-pointed nose. He has long dark hair that points in all directions. Yugo is a sturdy elf, with broad shoulders, strong hands with quick, nimble figures and an enormous black moustache. Sam is a rotund elf, as large around as both of his friends put together. His generous bottom is barely contained by his bar stool. He has curly red hair and a perpetual scowl on his face.

Iggy tugged on Sam’s sleeve. “It is getting late. We should go.”

Sam pulled his sleeve out of Iggy’s grasp. “What do you mean it’s getting late? The sun won’t be coming up for months.”¹

“It is getting late,” said Yugo. “We should get going. We have that new toy launch in the morning.” Yugo had been looking forward to the new toy launch for weeks. Nobody knew what the new toy of the year would be. Yugo had submitted several designs and he thought that his reptile bulldozer was a real banger. He ought to know; he his designs had been declared “New Toy of the Year” for almost 200 years running. He would hate to see that streak end.

“Fine. We can go. Right after the next pie,” said Sam. He started gathering up his belongings, which included his ElfPad, cribbage board, blood pressure cuff and the latest issue of *Elf Gossip Weekly*.

“Do you really need to bring all this stuff to the pub?” asked Iggy.

Sam snorted. “You should never go to the pub unprepared. You never know when you might be asked to leave.”

Just then the bartender approached, leaned on the table and said, “I think it’s time for you boys to leave.” He was a burly elf with a bald head and traces of a grizzled beard. His arms were enormous, and Iggy could not keep his eyes off them. They were thick and rippled with muscles. He had a tattoo on his massive bicep of a red heart with a crack through it surrounded by the phrase “*Last Christmas I gave you my heart, the very next day you gave it away.*” There was surely a story there. Iggy would not stop thinking about those arms until he learned that story.

Sam pointed at a cuckoo clock on the far wall. “Your clock over there says it’s only 9:30.”

¹ Sam had a point. In the winter months, the sun does not rise at the North pole until about half past March.


“Aye.” The grizzled bartender with the memorable arms said. He stabbed his muscled thumb at the cuckoo clock. “It’s 9:30 over there. But its 2:30 over here, and that means its closing time.”²

“I haven’t even had my supper yet,” said Sam. “I was going to have one of your excellent puffin pies.”

“You’ve already had two of our excellent puffin pies and an extra-large helping of candy cane ice cream,” said the bartender. “It’s past two. It’s time for you and your pals to get up and go.”

Sam pushed his cribbage board into his bag. “Fine. I’ll take my business elsewhere.”

“You won’t find a unique and refined atmosphere like this anywhere else,” said the bartender.

“Won’t stop me from looking,” said Sam. He dropped down from his stool with an audible  and headed for the door, where Iggy and Yugo were already waiting.

“Cheer up, Sam,” said Iggy. “You can get that pie tomorrow.”

Sam just grunted. “I want a pie now.”

“All of the pie shops are closed,” said Yugo. “There is no pie to be had at the North Pole.”

“There is always pie to be had if you look hard enough,” said Sam. He shoved his bag of pub supplies into Iggy’s unexpected grasp. “You guys go home without me. I’ll be right along after I find some pie.”


Iggy looked over at Yugo who just shrugged.

“Suit yourself,” said Iggy. “But do not stay out too long. We have a big day tomorrow.”

“Yeah, yeah,” said Sam, and he tramped off into the snow, a hungry elf in search of some pie.

² The time of day is not easy to ascertain at the North Pole. All time zones converge at the North Pole, so it can be early morning on one side of a room and getting on midnight on the other. The makers of the dauntingly expensive ElfWatch have stopped providing IT support to owners who attempt to use their watch north of the 89th parallel.

A Pie is Purloined

 ACCORDING TO THE *WIGGINS GUIDE TO THE NORTH POLE*, the finest pies at the North Pole come from the little kitchen of Mrs. Esmerelda Glitterthumbs. The Wiggins Guide describes them in the following glowing terms:

In a land filled with candy confections, there is one enchanting creation that transcends the boundaries of dessert – the Peppermint Plum Pie of the Widow Glitterthumbs. From the first glance, it is plain that this Pie is not just any dessert; it is a work of art. Its flawless golden crust, bearing the marks of artisanal craftsmanship, beckons with promises of a divine revelation. As one delves deeper, a symphony of aromas envelopes the senses, a harmonious marriage of ripe peppermint plums, hints of nutmeg, and a tantalizing kiss of witch hazel.

Each bite is a journey. The crust, at once delicate and robust, yields with a satisfying crispness. The peppermint plum filling, presents a symphony of flavors, that neither shies away from showcasing the natural essence of the peppermint plums nor overindulges in sugary extravagance. To the creator of this Peppermint Plum Pie, we extend our utmost admiration and gratitude for gracing our taste buds with such an extraordinary delight. This is a culinary masterpiece that will linger in our memory, and it is our sincere hope that others will have the privilege to savor its brilliance. ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Esme, as her friends might have called her if she had any, lived in a little cottage at the end of Mistletoe Road. She was as old as Christmas and knew all there was to know about baking the perfect peppermint plum pie.

The perfect peppermint plum pie requires special care and just a little bit of elf magic and Esme also knew all there was to know about elf magic. She sliced butter churned from fresh reindeer milk into her flour. Then she sprinkled in a pinch of salt and a pinch of nutmeg and then just a little more salt before she rolled the dough out into a wide circle. Then she folded it over and rolled it again and again and again. She gently laid the dough into the pan and sprinkled some North Pole snow onto it to keep it fresh while she worked on the filling.

She hobbled out to her little shed and plucked a few peppermint plums, fresh off of the vine. She sliced them neatly and dropped them into a bowl. She scooped in sugar plums and glittery spices from the far south.³ She stirred it

³ Here, the far south refers to Happy Sherman's Emporium, which was about 3 blocks south of Esme's cottage. Esme did not get out much.

all together with a healthy dollop of Olde Elf's Whisky and then poured another healthy dollop for herself.

She trimmed the extra pastry from the edge of the pie tin and expertly wove the scraps into a lattice top that she laid across the fruity filling. She whispered an old elf rhyme to the crust and then laid it gently into her little wood oven.

There was nothing left to do but wait, so Esme poured herself another dollop of Olde Elf's Whisky and slumped into her little rocking chair in the corner..

Forty five minutes passed and the little alarm clock at the corner of the stove roused Esme from her whisky induced slumber. "Pie's ready," she croaked and slowly rose up from her chair. She walked stiffly over to the oven and bent down to open the door. She carefully lifted the pie from the rack and drew it out.

Blue steam wafted from golden brown crust. Esme drew in a deep breath and smiled. "The perfect peppermint plum pie". She shuffled to the window to set it on the ledge to cool.

It takes only a few moments for a pie to cool on a windowsill at the North Pole. Esme indulged in a little more Olde Elf's Whisky and then turned back to the window to bring her pie inside.

The pie was gone.

Some thief had stolen her pie from right under her nose.

Esme shook her head slowly and scowled. She knew well who the culprit must be. Only one elf would be so bold and so brazen as to sneak off with an old elf's pie from her very own kitchen window.

"It was Sam it was. Sam it was what pilfered my perfect peppermint plum pie. Well, that is the last pie that Sam it was will ever pilfer."

She trundled over to her crooked bookshelf and selected the oldest book from the end of the row. She opened it and ran her knobbled finger along its crinkled pages. "Heh heh heh," she cackled and then she read aloud some words in the *Olde Elfen Tongue*. A raven screeched and the candles on her table flickered. A cold wind blew across the North Pole.

"That will be just the thing," said "I have just the thing for that Sam it was. If he wants an old woman's pie, then pie he shall have. In abundance."

And then she cackled an eerie witchy cackle. It really was quite awful.

Esme Glitterthumbs Delivers a Curse

ELVES BARRACKS B HAD SEEN BETTER DAYS. After all, it was over 300 years old and none of the original structure, wiring or plumbing systems satisfied any contemporary building code. *Wiggins Guide to the North Pole* has this to say about Elves Barracks B:

Elves Barracks B is a dilapidated block of over fifty apartments located a short commute from the main toy workshop at the North Pole. Faded paint, cracked walls, and overgrown vegetation give the impression of a property that is long past its best before date. Upon entering the building, one is greeted by a dated and unkempt lobby. The flooring appears worn, and the walls could benefit from a fresh coat of paint. The elevator is unreliable and frequently out of service.

The condition of individual apartments varies, but many suffer from outdated fixtures and a lack of modern amenities. Shared spaces such as hallways, stairwells, and laundry facilities appear neglected. Cleanliness and maintenance are subpar, contributing to an overall feeling of disrepair. Insufficient lighting in common areas, broken entry systems, and lax access controls can compromise the safety of residents.

Prospective tenants should carefully consider these factors before committing to a lease. Local property management should take immediate action to address these issues and invest in revitalizing the property to provide a habitable and pleasant living environment. ★ ½

Iggy, Yugo and Sam live in Elves Barracks B. Unlike most of the other apartments, their suite is tidy, thanks to Iggy and fitted out with the most modern and innovative appliances, thanks to Yugo. The kitchen is well-used, thanks to Sam.

Esmerelda Glitterthumbs pushed open the main lobby door with her cane and then clattered down the hall. She took a moment to run her hooked finger along the top of a rusted radiator. She raised her fingertip to the end of her nose and studied it with a disapproving eye. She wiped it off on her apron. Then she pulled her apron up over her head and stuffed it into a waste basket in the corner. “Dirty, dirty barracks elves,” she said.

She paused in front of the elevator. There was a yellowed slip of paper taped to the elevator door that said:

Out of Service

Repairman has been called.

From the faded look of the paper on the door, it appeared that the repairman had been called several years earlier and had never called back. Esme snorted and hobbled over to the stairs.

It was a feat of some considerable effort for Esme to climb the stairs to the third floor. She stopped at the landing at the top and took a deep whistling breath. She bent over and gasped, "I really need to do more cardio."

After a few moments, Esme collected herself and hobbled down the hall to the door of Apartment 3J. It was a metal door, with peeling blue paint and rusted hinges. Esme rapped on the door with the end of her nobbled cane. Each rap of the thick end of her cane left a little dent in the aged metal door.

She was about to raise her cane and deliver another door denting drum roll when the door opened with a sudden squeak. Yugo stood in the doorway, his resting mustachioed face on full display. "May I help you?" he asked.

"You may," said Esme. She lowered her cane and adjusted her shawl. "I am here for that sneaky Sam it was, what stole my pie and I have a message for him what stole my pie it was Sam it was."

"Sam is sleeping," said Yugo. "Sam sleeps a lot. He says he needs his beauty rest."

Iggy joined Yugo at the door. "What is the message?"

"You tell that Sam it was that I know it was Sam it was what stole my pie it was Sam it was," said Esme.

"I am sorry," said Iggy. "But I am really not following you.":

"It was Sam it was what stole my pie," said Esme. "And you tell Sam it was I know it was him, he is a sneaky little elf he is and it was him what stole my pie. So you tell him that I know it was him."

"Ah" said Yugo. "You think Sam stole your pie?"

"That does not sound like Sam," said Iggy. Iggy always assumed the best about everyone.

"He does like pie," said Yugo.

"That he does," said Iggy, "and he certainly eats his share of pie."

"More than his share, really," said Yugo.

"But he is not a thief," said Iggy.

"Really?" said Yugo. "He cheats at elf poker."

“How can you be sure?”

“He had a hand with five aces last week.”

Iggy shrugged. “That happens sometimes in elf poker.”⁴

The elves started at the sound of a prodigiously tough snore and a few moments later, Sam strolled into the room. He was dressed only in a pair of soiled boxer shorts. They were largely obscured by Sam’s prodigiously tough belly, but a keen observer would see that the boxers bore the distinctive logo of the North Pole Demon-Slugs, Sam’s favourite Arctic Slooging League⁵ team.

Iggy turned away at the sight of Sam’s deplorable boxer shorts.

“What’s going on?” said Sam.

“It seems that you have a visitor,” said Yugo. He stepped aside and Esme shuffled into the room. She lifted her cane and poked it at Sam’s belly.

“I knows it was ye, Sam it was, it was ye what stole my pie,” said Esme.

“Ow,” said Sam. “Knock that off you crazy old crone. You’re going to leave a mark.” Indeed. There were already a half dozen growing red welts on Sam’s belly where Esme had poked him with her cane.

“It was you what gobbled up me peppermint plum pie it was. I know it was you Sam it was. But here’s the thing,” said Esme, and she punctuated this with a particularly vigorous poke at Sam’s navel. “I puts a curse on ye, I did. An old elf curse it was, Sam it was. A curse for Christmas Day. Heh. Heh. Heh. Ho Ho Ho.” Her laugh sounded like winter tears.

“A curse you say?” said Sam.

“A curse I say,” said Esme.

“And what sort of curse might that be?” Sam yawned. He yearned to see this annoying woman go on her way and to get back to his nap.

⁴ Elf poker is a variation of Texas Hold ‘Em, and played with a deck of 72 cards with eight suits (hearts, diamonds, spades, clubs, stars, flowers, cucumbers and hockey pucks). Because there are eight aces in the deck, a hand of five aces happens sometimes.

⁵ The Arctic Slooging League, or ASL for short, is the premier professional arctic slooging league in the world. Arctic slooging is a stick and ball game played on a snow-covered pitch. The aim is to direct the sloop, a hard ovoid ball the size and shape of a small watermelon, into the opposing team’s goal by propelling it with a hacker, which is a large wooden paddle. The secondary aim of the game is to strike your opponent with the hacker at every opportunity. It is a pointless, violent game. Sam loves it.

“It be a fine curse it be. If ye like pie so well then pie ye shall have. And in abundance. All the pies at the North Pole. Every bite of pie will in your belly be. Let that be a curse on ye, Sam it was.”

“Let me get this straight,” said Sam. “Every time someone eats a pie at the North Pole, that pie will end up in me?”

“Yes indeed, Sam it was, yes indeed.” Esme cackled. “Heh. Heh. Heh. Ho Ho Ho.”

“Cool,” said Sam. He turned around and headed back to his nap.

“You will rue the day ye stole my pie Sam it was!” Esme shouted as Iggy guided her gently out the door. “That’s a curse on ye! An old elves curse ye know!”

Iggy eased Esme into the hallway. He bowed slightly and then gently closed the apartment door.

Esme raised her gnarled fist and shouted at the closed and dented door. “Merry Christmas to ye and to all a good night!” Then she turned and made her way slowly down the hall and down the stairs.

We Are Going to Run Out of Buttons



AN ELF CURSE IS NO SMALL THING. IT IS, IN FACT, a big honking deal. There are only a few elves at the Noeth Pole who know anything about elf curses, and most of those are so old they have forgotten whatever they might have once known.

The *Wiggins Guide to the North Pole* is a travel book focussed on attractions and amusements on offer at the North Pole and as such, does not delve into old elf spells in any detail. It does, however, include the following informative footnote in a short chapter titles *The Magiks of the North Pole*:

Beware the sinister whisper of the elf witch, for her curses are the stuff of nightmares, a terror that transcends the realms of the living and plunges into the darkest abyss of the supernatural. The curse she weaves is a symphony of despair, a poison that infiltrates your every thought, your every dream. As her words slither from her lips, they seep into your very being, infecting your mind with haunting visions. You see your worst fears materialize; nightmares unleashed to torment you. Your waking hours become a relentless parade of horrors, and sleep offers no sanctuary.

The curse of the elf-witch is relentless, a shadow that never wanes, a specter that haunts your every step. The elf-witch's vengeance is swift and unforgiving, and those who dare to challenge her may find themselves forever lost in a realm of eternal terror, a place where the very concept of hope is but a distant memory. Zero ★

Sam awoke from his midwinter's nap with a stomach-ache. It was a considerable stomach-ache for Sam's stomach was, itself, considerable. He pulled back the covers and stared down at his belly. It was big, round and swollen, like an enormous pink egg.

"Doesn't look any different," he thought and then he shuffled out of his room and into the little kitchen he shared with Iggy and Yugo. Iggy was putting the finishing touches on his usual breakfast: vegan yogurt with fruit and a smattering of diced almonds. Yugo was tinkering with the new nano-wave oven.⁶

"Good morning, Sam," said Iggy cheerfully. "Would you like some breakfast?"

Sam looked down at Iggy's plate of yogurt covered berries and wrinkled his nose. "I'll pass," he said. "I'm not hungry, anyway."

Yugo looked up from the workings of the oven. "That does not sound like you. Are you all right?"

"I have a stomach-ache," said Sam. "I've never felt like this before. I feel ... full."

Iggy and Yugo exchanged a look. "It must be Esme's curse," said Iggy.

"There is no such thing as curses," said Yugo. "I'm sure there is some medical explanation."

"All of the pies at the North Pole," said Iggy. "That is what Esme said."

"I am sure she was just trying to frighten Sam because he took her pie," said Yugo.

"But, I didn't take her stupid pie," said Sam. "I don't like those fruity pies that much. And I'm allergic to peppermint plums. They give me wind. And a rash."

"A windy rash, if you will," said Iggy.

"That sounds unpleasant for all involved," said Yugo.

"Exactly," said Sam.

⁶ Nano-waves are much smaller than micro-waves, which allows for an even shorter cooking time than a conventional micro-wave oven. Yugo's new nano-wave oven can heat a plate of frozen pizza pops to mouth burning intensity in less than ten seconds.

“We have to do something,” said Iggy. “Sam did not steal the pie! He is innocent! He has been wrongfully cursed!”

“It is not a curse,” said Yugo. “It is probably just something he ate. It is just an undigested bit of beef, a blot of mustard, a crumb of cheese or a fragment of underdone potato. This is from a stitch, not a witch, whatever this is.”

Iggy stomped his pointy toed boot. “Come on Yugo. This is the North Pole. There is magic around every corner and under every snowball. Curses are real.”

“Oh dear gentle Iggy, magic is just how we explain the problems that we cannot solve by science,” said Yugo. “A foaming cup of NaHCO_3 ⁷ and seltzer will set Sam right in no time.”

Yugo quickly stirred up a frothing mug of his digestive mixture. He passed it to Sam who just shook his head. “I couldn’t swallow a drop. I am absolutely full.”

Iggy rattled through their little medicine cabinet. He pulled out a bottle of peppermint flavoured antacid tablets and offered one to Sam. “Here, try one of these.”

Sam held up his hand. “I just can’t”

“Come on,” said Iggy. “It is only wafer thin.”

“I’ve got no room,” said Sam. “There is no room at this inn.” He smiled at what he thought was a clever Christmas themed joke but smiling just made his stomach hurt more.

“You cannot eat even a tiny minty little tablet, even if it might make you feel better?” asked Yugo.

“I can’t bear to have even a single bite,” said Sam.

Yugo drew in a breath. “It is a witch’s curse.”

“I told you so,” said Iggy.

“All right, we finally agree I’ve got a witch’s curse on my belly. Maybe I should call in sick and go see Dr. Betterbutter.” Sam quite liked calling in sick. It meant he got the whole day off. He liked it so well that he had used up all his sick days for the next fifty years. He was sure he would feel better by then.

⁷ NaHCO_3 is the chemical composition of bicarbonate of soda, perhaps commonly known as baking soda. A mixture of baking soda and carbonated water (H_2O) is often administered to ease an upset stomach.

“Dr. Betterbutter cannot remove a witch’s curse,” said Iggy.

“I would not trust Dr. Betterbutter to remove a wart,” said Yugo. “That old elf is a quack”⁸

“We need to get you back to Esme,” said Iggy. “You know the old elf saying: ‘Only she who dealt it can melt it.’”

“That is not a real saying,” said Yugo.

“Shush,” shushed Iggy. “It does not matter that I just made up the old elf saying. It goes without saying, or old elf saying, that only the elf that cursed Sam can remove the curse.”

“Your imagined elf saying is entirely plausible,” said Yugo. “And the logic of your conclusion is unassailable. We need to get Esme to lift this thing she has placed on Sam.” Yugo was still not ready to call it a curse.

“Why thank you Yugo,” said Iggy. He took a small bow.

Sam cleared his throat loudly. “If the two of you can check out of each others’ fan clubs for a moment, we do have a growing problem here.” It was true, Sam’s waistline had grown three sizes since he had entered the kitchen. His black boxers with the Demon-Slugs logo were approaching their breaking point. Indeed, at that moment the button at the top of his fly burst free and shot across the kitchen and out the window. That button flew so fast and so far, it has never been found.⁹

“Let us go to Esme then,” said Yugo. “I am sure that once Sam explains his windy rash, she will acknowledge her mistake and remove whatever enchantment she might have placed on our friend.”

“You two are finally making sense,” said Sam. He grunted and then sent another button into low Earth orbit.

“We better hurry,” said Iggy. “Sam is running out of buttons.”

⁸ The word “quack” is used to describe a physician of dubious skill or character. It derives from the Dutch word *quacksalver*, or *kwakzalver*, a seller of nostrums, snake oil and other cures of questionable quality and effectiveness. The quacksalver was usually too uneducated to enter physicians’ guilds or too low-born to be welcomed by medical colleges. Many plied their trade at county fairs and the like, hawking their ineffective homemade remedies in loud, attention-grabbing voices, like the quack of a duck.

⁹ An object, like a button, that achieves a velocity of 28,000 kilometers an hour will reach low Earth orbit and circle the world forever. It is likely that Sam’s button is still up there, somewhere.

The Raven

THERE ARE ONLY THREE WAYS TO LEAVE THE NORTH POLE. The most famous of these is in a sled pulled by eight tiny reindeer. There is only one person in the world who gets to travel that way, and he is not very good about taking on passengers.

The second of these is from the North Pole International Airport (NPI), which is only serviced in the winter months by Elfaway Airlines, a small charter business that offers tropical getaways to elves who have just had enough of winter. It is a niche business, but a successful one, as there are a lot of elves who, like geese, are more than happy to head south when the days grow short and even more so when the days stop happening altogether.

North Pole International is a small airport that only hosts two or three flights a week. It has one gate and a short runway made of ice. The *Wiggins Guide to the North Pole* has this to say about it:

North Pole International Airport (NPI) is unlike any other airport in the world. Nestled at the top of the world, it offers a truly unique experience for adventurous travelers. However, it is essential to set your expectations right before embarking on a journey to this remote and frigid location. The airport's remote location and limited accessibility contribute to its charm, but the harsh climate at the North Pole means that flights are subject to delays and cancellations. Be prepared for potential schedule changes.

The bone-chilling temperatures at the North Pole offer a glimpse into the harsh Arctic environment. Make sure to dress warmly and prepare for the frigid conditions. The wait at the taxi stand can be taxing, but there is a good chance that you will spot a polar bear or a seal while you are shivering at the side of the curb. ★ ★

Iggy, Yugo and Sam arrived at Esme's little cottage at the end of Mistletoe Road an hour later. They had to wait for Sam to struggle into his size XXXL red jacket. It was the one he kept at the back of his closet and only wore for special occasions, like the hour after Christmas dinner. Even when he pulled on the elastic emergency expansion cord, he could only pull the zipper up halfway. Then, the zipper parted from the bottom, so that the jacket was closed only by the slider¹⁰ in the middle, which could no longer be moved in either direction. They finally gave up, and Sam followed Iggy and Yugo out, with the zipper of his jacket hopelessly stuck at the midway point.

¹⁰ The movable part of a zipper which joins or separates the two sides is called a 'slider'. The part that is grasped to move the slider is called a 'tab' or 'pull'.

Iggy and Yugo reached the cottage first with their jackets appropriately zippered. Sam waddled a little way behind, breathing heavily.

Iggy rapped gently at the door. A gentle rapping, as of someone tapping at the cottage door. There was no answer, so Iggy peered through the little window beside the door. He saw only darkness inside. Only darkness and nothing more.

Iggy turned to Yugo. "There is nobody there."

Yugo cocked his head. "There is something at the lattice."

"It is just the wind," said Iggy. "Only that and nothing more."

Then the sash flew open and with a flirt and flutter there stood a raven on the window sill. The raven perched there for a moment, its black eyes staring at each of the elves in turn and then it said, "What do you want? Why are you rapping at the cottage door?"

Yugo blinked and said, "ravens cannot talk."

Quoth the raven, "of course ravens can talk. Ravens talk all the time. I'm talking right now."

"It is magic," whispered Iggy.

"It cannot be," said Yugo. "There must be some explanation."

"There is," said Iggy. "It is magic."

"Whatever it is, it is the only thing talking any sense around here," said Sam. He stepped up to the big black bird. "Where's Esme? That old witch put a curse on me, and she has to take it off."

The raven gave a series of stuttering squawks that sounded something like a giggle. "You must be Sam it was. The elf what ate her pie."

"Yes, I am Sam. Sam I am," said Sam. "And I never ate that pie."

"Esme knows, she knows who ate the pie. Esme knows everything," said the raven.

"Can you tell us where she is?" asked Iggy.

“Esme’s gone,” snapped the raven. “Gone forevermore. Or until spring anyway.”

Sam stepped toward the raven. He was about to grab it by the throat when it flew up and lighted on a perch above the cottage door. “Where has she gone.”

“The raven gave its stuttering squawk and replied, “gone to the beach, Esme has. Far away from the cold and the Christmas and all the elves. Gone to the beach she has. Only there and nowhere more.”

“The beach? What beach? There are a million beaches!” said Sam.

But the raven, never flitting, remained sitting on the ledge above the cottage door, but it spoke not another word.

Sam cajoled it to reply, but it said not one word more.

Iggy pulled Sam by the sleeve. “Come on. We will figure it out.”

“There is no sense arguing with a bird,” said Yugo. Then he added thoughtfully, “because birds cannot speak.”

The elves walked away from Esme’s cottage. As they reached the corner and turned out of sight the raven squawked again and said, “get you gone you dirty elves and come back nevermore!”

All You Can Eat Pie Night



IT TOOK ONLY A LITTLE DETECTIVE WORK TO DEDUCE where Esme had gone. There had been only one flight the previous day that departed North Pole International Airport, and it had flown to Cancun, with stops in Inuvik, Tuktoyaktuk and Reykjavik. Only one of these places had a beach, and that was where the elves were headed.

The third way to get in and out of the North Pole is the little red snowmobile that Yugo had built in his spare time. The *Wiggins Guide to the North Pole* praises Yugo’s snowmobile in this glowing review:

The most remarkable snowmobile in the world was designed and built by an elf named Yugo and can be found at the North Pole. This snowmobile

is the ultimate all-terrain vehicle; designed to explore snow-covered landscapes, soar through the skies, and dive beneath icy waters. This cutting-edge snowmobile represents the pinnacle of versatility and speed.

It boasts a sleek and aerodynamic design, with a reinforced lightweight frame constructed from gleaming red titanium. Its streamlined body facilitates efficient movement through snow, air, and water, while integrated fins and stabilizers ensure stability during high-speed maneuvers. It can seamlessly transition between different modes of travel. The twin lithium fusion engines enable it to travel at incredible speeds on the snow and in the air, while a specialized propeller system kicks in for underwater navigation.

Passengers are comfortably housed inside a climate-controlled cabin, which offers them a panoramic view of their surroundings. The snowmobile is equipped with an advanced navigation and entertainment system, making the journey as enjoyable as the destinations.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

It was that very snowmobile that now carried the elves south to find Esmerelda Glitterthumbs. It had taken both Iggy and Yugo to get Sam inside. It was a very snug fit and he got stuck only once, for a moment or two, and then Iggy and Yugo were able to push him through.

The snowmobile flew swiftly towards the Arctic Circle. “How much longer until we get there?” asked Iggy.

“Another hour or so,” said Yugo. “We will get back in time for Christmas.”

“Oh, I am not worried about that,” said Iggy. “It is just that today is Saturday and Saturday night is **All-You-Can-Eat-Pie-Night** at the *Walrus and Ulu*. I am not sure that Sam can handle it.”

“What are you talking about?” said Sam. “I love **All-You-Can-Eat-Pie-Night**. It’s one of the best nights of the week, second only to **All-You-Can-Eat-Tacos-On-Tuesday**. **All-You-Can-Eat-Chili-Thursdays** is also pretty good.

“Yes, I know. But if we cannot lift this curse, you will be having all of the pies.”

Sam sat quietly, as he tried to decide whether that would be a good or a bad thing. At that moment, the slider on his jammed zipper split apart under the pressure of Sam’s expanding waistline. Sam decided that maybe **All-You-Can-Eat-Pie-Night** was probably not a good idea after all.

Yugo pressed a flashing blue button and the powerful engines roared. The snowmobile sped south across the terminator¹¹ and into the daylight. It was the first time the elves had seen the sun rise since early October. Yugo increased the altitude of the snowmobile and leveled off midway through the stratosphere. He flipped on the autopilot and slipped some pizza pops into the onboard nano-wave oven. Six seconds later, the oven pinged to alert him that his snack was perfectly toasted.

Sam shook his head. “Thanks anyway, but I couldn’t possibly eat right now.”

Yugo took a pizza pop and passed the plate to Iggy. “These are not for you. This time.”

Iggy was enjoying his second pizza pop when he heard a siren far below. “Should we pull over?”

Yugo studied his dashboard monitor. “It is not that kind of a siren.”

“What is it then?” asked Sam.

Yugo grimaced. “It is the North Warning System,” said Yugo.

“The North Warning what now?” asked Sam.

“No time to explain. Check the footnote¹²,” said Yugo. “In our hurry to leave I forgot to file our flight plan. Now we have been picked up on radar.”

The sound of the siren was drowned out by the roar of two F-35 fighter jets which rose to intercept them.

“Fasten your seatbelts and hang on to something,” said Yugo. “This is going to get a little hairy.” He gave the steering wheel a hard turn and the snowmobile banked sharply right.

Iggy and Sam’s faces turned white. “Oh dear,” said Iggy.

Yugo pulled back on the wheel and the snowmobile shot straight upwards. A rocket powered missile whistled past Sam’s window.

“Oh dear,” said Sam.

¹¹ The ‘terminator’ is the moving line that separates the daylit side of a planetary body from the dark night side. During the winter months, the terminator remains well south of the North Pole and does not reach it until mid-spring. The terminator is also known as the ‘twilight zone’ (neener neener neener neener).

¹² The North Warning System (NWS) is a joint Canadian and American defence system. It is comprised of a series of radar stations located along the northern Canadian coast. It is intended to detect an aerial incursion or attack from the polar region, which is the shortest distance from Russia to North America.

The two fighter jets closed in.

“Do something!” Iggy shouted. Yugo pushed the wheel forward and the snowmobile dropped like a stone and sped past the rising F-35s. The big jets turned smartly and plummeted after them. Yugo spun the wheel and the snowmobile corkscrewed through the air as missiles rocketed past them.

Sam’s face turned from white to green. “Do something else,” he said, weakly.

Yugo tapped on his monitor with his right hand while he used his left to guide the snowmobile through a complicated series of evasive maneuvers. Green lines of code scrolled across the screen. “Just one more moment,” Yugo whispered.

The fighter jets circled above them and dropped into close pursuit of the snowmobile. They screamed 10,000 feet above the ground, generating sonic booms¹³ that shattered windows for miles around. The two F-35s positioned themselves in attack formation. Bullets flew past the windows and glanced off of the snowmobile’s titanium hull.

“Almost there,” said Yugo, his fingers dancing on his touch screen. Then he leaned back and smiled. “Got you.”

The green lines of text on the screen dissolved into a split screen view of the cockpit of the two fighter jets. The screen displayed the same view each of the jet pilots could see, with the rear of the snowmobile visible through the windshield and the complicated control panel of each jet below.

Twin shelves extended from under the dashboard, a video game joystick mounted on each one. Yugo reached forward and gently gripped the two joysticks. “Iggy, take the wheel,” he said.

“What is going on?” asked Iggy nervously, but he leaned over and grabbed the steering wheel.

“I have taken control of both fighters. You can see their dashboards on my monitor. I just need to guide them down to a safe landing and then we will be on our way.” Yugo gently pushed forward on each of the joysticks.

Sam turned stiffly in the back seat to see the two F-35s slowly descending. He made a low whistle. “You’re a bit of a nerd Yugo, but I got to admit you have some mad science chops.”

¹³ A sonic boom is the sound generated by shock waves that are created when an object travels faster than the speed of sound (the speed of sound varies depending on altitude and temperature, but is about 770 miles per hour or 1235 kilometers per hour)). A sonic boom sounds like an explosion or a loud thunderclap.

The two fighter jets approached a short runway far below the snowmobile. Yugo's tongue poked out of the side of his mouth as he concentrated on bringing the airplanes in for a landing.

Iggy tapped him on the shoulder. He pointed at the monitor. A red button on each of the displayed dashboards flashed on and off. "What is that?"

"Do not touch that," said Yugo.

Iggy was several hundred years old, but he remained a child at heart. There is no child in the world that can resist the temptation of pressing a flashing red button, especially when they have been told not to. Sweat beaded on Iggy's forehead as he struggled to overcome the urge to press those buttons.


In the back seat, Sam struggled to reach forward and hit the buttons himself. He was not as much of a child at heart, but a forbidden flashing red button was too much to ignore.

"Can you two control yourselves?" said Yugo, as he carefully twisted the joysticks.

In the end, neither Iggy nor Sam could control themselves and they each pressed on the flashing red buttons; Iggy on the left and Sam on the right.

A mile below them, both pilots immediately ejected from their aircraft and shot up into the air. They arced into the air and then dropped slowly to the ground under a pair of big yellow parachutes.

Yugo shook his head. "I had this under control. There was no need to hit the ejector button."

But then he sneezed and slammed the two joysticks forward, sending the F-35s into a steep nosedive which was followed by a flaming ! The two pilots floated through smoke cloud and reached the ground safely. They both returned to their homes that night and lived on happily. Their part in this story is done.

Yugo hit a purple switch and the joysticks retracted back under his dashboard. He took the steering wheel back from Iggy and said, "you two got lucky."

Iggy and Sam looked at each other, nodded and exchanged a high five.

Yugo adjusted his rear-view mirror and said, "there are no more radar stations the rest of the way¹⁴. Get out our sunscreen out boys, next stop, the beach!"

¹⁴ The NWS replaced a series of radar stations that were built in the 1950s. The northernmost of these was the Distant Early Warning or DEW Line, which was located in the high north generally along the line of the NWS today. A second line of radar

Feliz Navidad



IGGY WORKED FOR AN UNCOMFORTABLE HOUR OR TWO to apply sunscreen on Sam's substantial girth. Sam had problems reaching his 'trouble spots' at the best of times, and the magically induced ingestion of a hundred or more pies had only increased the number and breadth of his 'trouble spots'.

By the time Iggy had attended to all of Sam's troublesome crevices, they were gliding into the brilliant sunshine of a December morning in Cancun.

"*Feliz Navidad*," said Yugo. "We have made it to Mexico. Just in time for Christmas."

The *Wiggins Guide to Mexico* has a few things to say about Mexican Christmas traditions:

Christmas in Mexico is a magical and vibrant celebration that blends rich traditions with festive and colourful customs. In the days leading up to Christmas, there are Posadas; a series of processions reenacting Mary and Joseph's search for a place to stay in Bethlehem. Participants go from house to house, singing traditional songs and asking for shelter.

On Christmas Eve, families gather for a festive feast featuring traditional Mexican dishes such as bacalao (codfish), tamales, and ponche (fruit punch), candied mango or peach gummies all followed by *La Misa de Gallo*, a late-night Mass to celebrate the birth of Jesus. Christmas Eve is often marked by vibrant firework displays lighting up the night sky.

On Christmas Day (Navidad) families gather to open colourful gifts delivered by Santa Clos, who delivers presents to all the good girls and boys (niñas y niños) each Navidad. ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

"We should get tacos," said Iggy. "I am starving."


Sam groaned. "You go on without me. I couldn't possibly."

Iggy and Yugo exchanged a look. If Sam was turning down tacos, the snowballs had just become real.

"We are getting tacos," said Yugo. "And you are coming with us."

stations, the Mid-Canada Line, or more familiarly, the McGill Fence, was spread along the middle of the Canadian provinces. A third line of radar stations, the Pine Tree Line, spanned the 50th parallel, north of the Canadian/American border. The original DEW Line, McGill Fence and Pine Tree Line were all decommissioned in the 1980s.

Sam groaned and shuffled to the end of the bench at the back of the snowmobile. “I might need a little help here, fellas.”

Iggy and Yugo each grabbed one of Sam’s outstretched arms and pulled. They pulled and pulled and then Sam begged them to stop pulling, but they pulled some more anyway and then, with a tremendous , Sam flew out of the snowmobile and plopped onto the ground like a large sack of clam chowder.

“My stomach hurts,” said Sam.

“I can only imagine,” said Iggy with a concerned look on his face. “You hit the ground pretty hard just now.”

“It’s not that,” said Sam. “I’m just so full. I feel like I might burst.”

“We need to find old Esme,” said Yugo.

“And some tacos,” said Iggy.

Sam groaned.

“Some small tacos,” said Iggy. They set off down a quiet dusty street in search of a taco stand, Iggy and Yugo out front and Sam waddling slowly behind them. Before long, the road widened and they passed into a small street market, with tables on either side offering shirts, sombreros and cheap souvenirs for the tourist trade.

Yugo pointed to a T-shirt on one of the tables and asked the little old man at who was seated nearby in a metal folding chair, “do you have this in a size XXXXXL?”

The old man nodded and pulled a very large shirt out of a cardboard box that was under the table. Yugo furiously haggled over the price, and they finally settled on 125 pesos,¹⁵ which the old man regarded as a complete rip-off and which Yugo considered far too much to pay for a T-shirt.

Yugo passed the T-shirt to Sam and said, “this is for you. I think your jacket is about to burst.”

As he spoke, the slider holding Sam’s green velvet jacket finally gave up. His jacket split apart and hung in pieces from his elbows. He shrugged His the remnants off and took the T-shirt from Yugo. “It’s too hot to be wearing velvet anyway.” He pulled the shirt over his head and tugged it over his expanding

¹⁵ About ten Canadian dollars.

waistline. It fit snugly over every one of Sam's growing folds and bumps. It was bright blue and said 'I ♥ Senioritas' in big happy yellow letters.

"Sam is right, it is too hot for these jackets," said Iggy.¹⁶ He turned to the little old man. "Do you have any more of these in a size XS?" The old man nodded and produced two identical, though smaller T-shirts. Iggy was not nearly as hard a bargainer as Yugo and ended up paying over 300 pesos for the pair.

The elves continued through the market in their matching blue T-shirts. At the end of the block, they came upon a taco stand. A young man with a thin black moustache was roasting beef and vegetables on a portable grill.

He grinned as the elves approached and said, "hola!"

"Um .. hola," said Iggy.

The young man gripped Iggy's hand and shook it warmly. "Call me Pedro. What can I get you fellows?"

Iggy looked down at his hand which was now dripping with taco scraps. He rubbed it on his pants. "Three tacos. Two tofu and one with everything."

Sam shook his head. "Nothing for me," he murmured.

"He has a stomachache," Yugo explained.

Pedro smiled. "I have just the thing for that. The *caliente especial*. It will clean you right up." Pedro slapped three tortillas on the grill. His hands blurred as he stirred tofu, vegetables and a fistful of bright red powder together. He flipped the mixture onto the tortillas and then wrapped them up in wax paper. He passed them to Iggy.

"Two tofu and a *caliente especial* with extra *caliente*." He held out his hand.

Yugo touched Iggy on the shoulder. "Let me take care of this." There followed a vigorous negotiation that left Pedro swearing and pulling at his moustache and only a few hundred pesos richer for all of his trouble.

Iggy took a bite of his taco. "Wow. That is delicious."

"It is very spicy though," said Yugo.

"Maybe I'll try a little bite," said Sam. He nibbled gently on the corner of his taco. He chewed it slowly, then his face turned red. Sweat streamed down his brow and he started coughing furiously.

¹⁶ The temperature at the North Pole in December ranges between -30 and -40° Celsius. In December, the mid day temperature in Cancun is as high as 30° Celsius.

“Are you all right?” asked Iggy, as he finished the last of his own taco.

“So hot,” Sam gasped.

“The *caliente especial*,” said Yugo.

“I think I’m dying,” said Sam. He clutched his throat and struggled to breathe.

“Look on the bright side,” said Iggy. “Pedro promised it would clean you out.”

Sam fell to his knees and wheezed. “I need ... water.”

“Oh, water won’t help with that,” said Pedro. Here, try this.” He passed Sam a large tumbler filled with a foaming brown liquid. Sam slurped it down eagerly.

Then he burped. A small flame came out of his mouth.

“What was that stuff?” Sam pleaded, tears running down his face.

“Mexican elf lager,” said Pedro. “Very strong. It will put out that fire.”

“It made the fire,” said Sam. His face was red and swollen.

“The *caliente especial*; she is not for everyone,” said Pedro.

Sam had lived his whole life at the North Pole. He had never felt heat like this before. It was as if a rocket had exploded in his belly. He was on fire from the inside out.

“More,” he wheezed. He took a second tumbler of Mexican elf lager from Pedro and drank it down. It burned the whole way.

Pedro winced. “I think your amigo needs to lie down. He’ll feel much better in the morning.”

“We are not from around here,” said Iggy.

“We have no place to stay,” said Yugo. “Where can we go?”

Pedro pointed to the end of the street. “Follow the posada.” A small procession passed the corner at the end of the block. They were led by a young man and woman, dressed in the fashion of Joseph and Mary on the road to Bethlehem.

Iggy and Yugo looked at each other and shrugged. They gathered up Sam and followed the little parade down the next street. It stopped at houses along the parade route, knocking on doors and asking for shelter. At every door they were turned away and the parade moved on.

“This is fun,” said Iggy.

“It sure is,” said Yugo.

“We should try some of those churros,” said Iggy as they passed another food cart. Sam just grunted, but Yugo had quickly struck a shrewd bargain for three churros.

The procession continued down another block. A mariachi band walked alongside them, singing Christmas carols in Spanish. At each house the parade passed, they asked for shelter and at each house they were turned away.

“We need to stop soon,” said Yugo. “Sam cannot go much longer.” Indeed, Sam huffed and puffed and shuffled along several yards behind them.

“Let us try this place,” said Iggy. They approached a large white stucco house with a wide entranceway. Iggy ran up the brick steps and knocked on the door.

A middle-aged gentleman with thinning black hair and dressed in a poncho answered the door. His poncho was red and green and woven in the style of an ugly Christmas sweater. It was adorned with reindeer, penguins and snowflakes, three things that were never seen in Mexico. Iggy immediately wondered if his name was Mr. Poncho.¹⁷

Iggy removed his cap and said, “excuse me, if it is not too much trouble my friend needs a place to rest for the night.”

Mr. Poncho looked puzzled. “This is my house. It is not an inn. I don’t have any space for strange elves.”

“Please sir,” said Yugo. “Our friend really needs to lie down.”

“He has a curse,” said Iggy.

“There is no such thing as curses,” said Yugo out of the side of his mouth.

“Look, I really don’t have any room. I suppose if you really need a place to stay, you could use the stable in the back. Just don’t disturb the donkey.”

“A stable? With a donkey? That is perfect,” said Iggy. He clapped his hands in delight. Mr. Poncho shrugged and showed them around to the back of the yard where there was a small stable, where a donkey chewed happily on a pile of hay.

“Make yourself at home,” he said. “But leave the donkey alone.”

Iggy, Yugo and Sam entered the stable, keeping clear of the donkey. At the back there stood a manger, with a pile of hay in the bottom.

¹⁷ His name was not Mr. Poncho. It was in fact Jose Felix de Santa Margarita. He will nonetheless be referred to as Mr. Poncho from here on out.

“Dibs on the manger,” said Sam, and he rolled into it and curled up into a ball.

“It does not get any more Christmassy than this,” said Iggy. “A night in a stable with a real donkey. The only thing that is missing is a visit from the sugar plum fairy.”

Just then there was a knock at the stable door. A short woman clad in her own ugly Christmas poncho stood there with a tray in her hand. “I thought you fellows might be hungry.”

Iggy and Yugo came up and grabbed a handful of spicy mango and peach gummy candies. “Sugar plums! Wait till we tell them at the North Pole,” said Iggy.

“Gracias, Mrs. Poncho,” said Yugo with a bow. The woman in the poncho gave him a strange look and then walked away.

Yugo nibbled on his gummy and then kicked some straw into a pile along the back wall. “It will do for one night.”

“We will need to find Esme in the morning,” said Iggy. “I do not know how much longer Sam can hold out. And it is **All-You-Can-Eat-Pie-Night** at the *Walrus and Ulu* tonight.”

“Sam will be fine,” said Yugo. “It is not a curse, it is just that taco. He will be right as rain in the morning.”

“I hope so,” said Iggy. Then he stacked his own pile of hay in the corner and bedded down for the night.

Things Are About to Get Uncomfortable

S*AM WOKE FROM A DREAM OF A PRETTY ELF IN A BIKINI nuzzling him on his neck. He puckered his lips and opened his eyes. A pair of big brown eyes looked back at him. A pair of big brown donkey eyes.

Sam screamed. The startled donkey responded by biting Sam on the ear.

Sam screamed even louder.

“I told you to mind the donkey,” said Mr. Poncho, who stood in the stable door.

“That donkey just bit my ear off!” Sam shouted.

“She only bit the pointy part off,” said Mr. Poncho. “Quit being such a baby. Now you look like the rest of us. If you ask me, it’s an improvement.”

Sam was of a mind to punch Mr. Poncho and his donkey in the mouth, but he had nearly doubled in size overnight and could not get himself out of the manger.

Iggy stepped in between Sam and the donkey. “Do not mind him, he always wakes up grumpy.”

“He will feel better once he has his morning milkshake,” said Yugo. Iggy and Yugo went over to the manger to help Sam out. In the end, Yugo had to throw a rope over one of the rafters and cajole the donkey into helping pull Sam out of his makeshift cot.

Sam’s XXXXL T-shirt clung to him like a sausage casing. “I do not think we can get a bigger size,” said Iggy.

“I do not think Sam can wait any longer,” said Yugo. “We need to find Esme at once.”

“She could be anywhere,” said Iggy.

“I know where she is,” said Sam.

“And where is that?” asked Yugo.

Sam reached into Iggy’s pocket and pulled out his copy of the *Wiggins Guide to Mexico*. He moistened his finger with his tongue and paged through the guidebook. He reached an entry on page 293 and passed it back to Iggy. “That is where we will find Esme.” He pointed at the top of the page with his pudgy finger:

Heavenly Haven Nude Beach:

Heavenly Haven Beach is the most popular destination on the Caribbean coast for nude and topless sunbathing. The moment you set foot on the powdery sands of Heavenly Haven Beach, a liberating atmosphere envelops you. The beachgoers, adorned in nothing but confidence, contribute to an inclusive ambiance where body positivity reigns supreme. Expect a harmonious blend of relaxation and celebration of natural beauty. Azure waters stretch as far as the eye can see, complemented by immaculate golden sands and lush greenery. The beach's untouched beauty creates an idyllic setting for both solitude and shared moments of joy.

Beachgoers are reminded that at Heavenly Haven Beach a culture of respect and acceptance prevails. The unwritten rule is simple: embrace your freedom while honoring the comfort of others and remember your eyes are up here! ★ ★ ★ ★ ½

“A nude beach? What would Esme be doing at a nude beach?” asked Iggy.

“Simple,” said Sam. “Esme hates being around people. If she came here to go to the beach, she is going to want the whole beach to herself. And there is nothing in the world that will empty out a beach faster than the sight of Esme’s 1000-year-old naked body.”

“Sam! That is a terrible thing to say!” said Iggy.

“Search your feelings Iggy, you know it to be true,” said Sam.

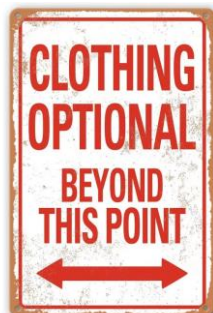
“Sam does have a point,” said Yugo. “It is a screwed-up point, but we have no other ideas.”

“I have never been to a nude beach before,” said Iggy. “I have no idea what to wear.” Yugo and Sam just rolled their eyes.

Fortunately, the stable door was wide enough for the donkey to pass in and out. They had to get Sam to turn sideways and push, but soon they were out of the stable and on their way to the Heavenly Haven Beach.

They reached Heavenly Haven Beach about five hours later. It would have been faster to take the snowmobile, but Sam could no longer fit inside. The midday sun was high above them and the heat was like nothing three Christmas elves had ever felt before.

There was a low fence that separated the beach from the road. At a gap in the fence there was a sign that said:



Sam squirmed out of his size XXXXXL T-shirt. It was too small for him by this point, anyway. It took a little effort, but soon his green velvet pants were also draped over the little fence. He turned to the others. “Come on then, what are you waiting for?”

Iggy blushed and then slowly removed his red velvet trousers. “I am going to leave my shirt on,” he said. “I burn easily.”

Yugo had already removed his clothes and hung them on the fence. His chest muscles rippled in the afternoon sun. Yugo did not have a six pack, he had a twelve pack. He looked like he had been carved from marble.

Sam gave a low whistle. “Wow. I had no idea.”

Yugo shook his head. “Come on, we should get this over with.” He led the others out onto the white sand.

The elves quickly retreated and pulled their boots back on. The sand was as hot as a *caliente especial*, and elvish feet were just not made for it. Then they headed out, Iggy in a blue T-shirt and the others wearing nothing but boots.

Their were beachgoers in the distance to their left and right, but the beach before them was completely empty. Empty, except for a single folding chair under a blue and yellow umbrella that had the word “Corona” written on it.

“That must be Esme under that umbrella,” said Iggy.

Yugo shivered. Sam put on a pair of dark sunglasses. “Lead the way, Iggy, I can’t see a thing out of these glasses.”

“Do you have another pair?” asked Yugo. Sam just shook his head.

They marched across the burning sand until they reached the little chair. Esmerelda Glitterthumbs sat in the shade of the umbrella, naked as the day she was born and snoring happily. Iggy and Yugo averted their eyes. Sam stared straight ahead, completely oblivious to the wrinkled and leathery millenarian¹⁸ sleeping before them.

Iggy coughed gently. Esmerelda Glitterthumbs did not move a muscle and kept on snoring happily. Yugo coughed a bit louder, but Esme just kept on snoring.

“Wake up you old bat!” shouted Sam and Esme lurched up into consciousness. Parts of her jiggled in ways that Iggy will see in his nightmares for years to come.

Esme blinked in the bright sunshine and then grinned a wicked toothy grin. “Well looky be if it isn’t Sam it was what stole my pie.”

“I never stole your pie you witch,” said Sam. “I can’t even eat peppermint plums.”

¹⁸ If a hundred-year-old person is a centenarian, then a thousand-year-old person must be a millenarian. You seldom meet a centenarian and meeting a millenarian is as rare as meeting a three-legged dodo.

“They give him wind,” said Iggy.

“And a rash,” said Yugo.

“A windy rash,” said Iggy.

“Sam has been wrongly accused,” said Yugo.

“And wrongly cursed,” said Iggy.

“There is no such thing as curses,” said Yugo.

“Step aside Sam it was,” said Esme. “You are blocking my sun.”

“Not until you lift this curse,” said Sam.

“Oh, you silly stupid elf, I can’t believe you came all this way to bother me on my beach,” said Esme. “There is no curse. There is no such thing as curses.”

“Told you so,” said Yugo.

“It is all in your big fat head,” said Esme. “Curses are the oldest kind of elf magic. They are nothing more than the power of suggestion. You believe you are cursed and so you are cursed.”

“What are you talking about Esme?” said Iggy. “Just look at him. He is as big as a house.”

“Hey,” said Sam.

“He’s just swelled up in this heat. North Pole elves can’t handle this heat. You get a chunky boy like this and he’ll blow up like a balloon every time. You get him home and he’ll be as right as rain in no time.”

“Really?” said Sam.

“Yes really,” said Esme. “Now get out of my sun.”

“Do you think you should cast some sort of a spell just to be sure?” asked Iggy.

“Begone elves,” said Esme, waving her hand to shoo them away. Iggy, Yugo and Sam turned to go.

“You can leave the sunglasses,” said Esme.

Sam passed his sunglasses to Esme. He blinked and squinted in the bright sunshine.

“Thank’ee,” said Esme. “Now vamoose.”

And so, they did. Iggy, Yugo and Sam vamoosed.

The Friends We Made Along the Way



CHRISTMAS EVE AT THE NORTH POLE. A night of celebration for elves. Their work is done for the year. The *Wiggins Guide to the North Pole* has this to say about Christmas Eve:

Christmas Eve at the North Pole is a spectacle of joy, camaraderie, and enchantment. The tireless efforts of Santa's elves culminate in a celebration that encapsulates the true spirit of Christmas. In the days leading up to Christmas Eve, Santa's industrious elves are a flurry of activity. From meticulously wrapping gifts to putting the finishing touches on toys, the workshop buzzes with cheerful camaraderie. The joy of creating the perfect presents for children around the world radiates from every elf in Santa's employ.

On Christmas Eve, while Santa and his team of reindeer embark on their annual journey, the elves gather for a grand feast. Tables are laden with festive treats such as sugar cookies, candy canes, hot cocoa and pies. The elves' tireless efforts have paid off, and the joy they have spread across the globe is reflected in the twinkle of every Christmas light.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Iggy, Yugo and Sam were joined by hundreds of other elves at the *Walrus and Utu* to celebrate Christmas Eve. They had claimed their usual table at the end of the bar, not far from the washroom.

Esme was true to her word. Once Sam realized that her curse was only worked as long as he believed it, his great big belly lost three sizes that day. On his return to the chilly North Pole he was as fit as cello and as hungry as ever. He was back in his regular green velvet tunic (size XL) and had already finished off three puffin pies and a half gallon of ElfLager.

Sam set his empty glass on the table and waved for another. He took a sip from his new glass and said, "I am not sure what the point of all that was. We didn't even save Christmas. And we didn't learn any lessons."

"Surely the real lesson is the friends we made along the way," said Iggy. "Like Pedro and Mr. and Mrs. Poncho.":

"And Esme," said Yugo.

"That witch is no friend of mine," said Sam.

“I learned that there is no such thing as elf curses. That it is all in your head,” said Iggy.

“I knew that already,” said Yugo.

“What I still don’t understand about all this is who stole the pie in the first place,” said Sam. “I just know it wasn’t me.”

Iggy took a small sip of his unsweetened water and coughed. “Well, actually,” he whispered. “That was me.”

Yugo coughed up his strained orange juice. “You stole the pie?”

Iggy shrugged. “I did not think I was stealing it. I had been going door to door collecting things for the Christmas Eve party. I saw the pie on the ledge of Esme’s cottage and I thought she left it there for the party. So, I picked it up.”

“Yugo looked around. “I do not see a peppermint plum pie at this party.”

Iggy blushed. “I am sorry, but it just smelled so good that when I got it back to the apartment, I thought I would have just a little taste. To see if it was good enough for the party, you understand”

Yugo nodded.

“Then I thought I should have another taste just to be sure and then one thing led to another and before you know it there was no pie left at all.”

“You ate an entire pie and let me take the blame?” said Sam.

Iggy lowered his head. “I thought it would be harmless and you do like pie. I never expected Esme to put a curse on you.”

“There is no such thing as curses,” said Yugo.

“That is right,” said Iggy. “There never was a curse at all. Everything worked out in the end.”

“And we made some friends along the way,” said Yugo.

Sam smiled and raised his glass. “Merry Christmas, Iggy.”

Iggy and Yugo raised their glasses, too. “Merry Christmas, Sam.”

Iggy, Yugo and Sam Will Return In:

Elves of Green Gables

or

Iggy, Yugo and Sam: The Lost Kingdom

or

Mr Poncho's North Pole Adventure

or

A Dream of Sugar Plums

or

A Song of Snow and Ice: An Epic Poem

or

Something Else Entirely

SANTA CLAUS WAS IN HIS OFFICE ON THE 24TH FLOOR of his gleaming silver skyscraper at the North Pole. He was seated behind his big desk which was made of solid oak carved from a single tree and was as long and wide as a small battleship.

The man seated across from him was short and stocky with long hair that from a recent transplant operation. He had died it a deep shade of brown. He wore a suit that was a little too large and a tie that was a little too short. He was also the richest man in the world.

“I am sorry that you came all this way,” said Santa Claus. “But I’m afraid that the North Pole is just not for sale. Not at any price.”

“I don’t think you understand the nature of the deal,” said the richest man in the world. “This is not an offer. It is a takeover. A hostile takeover.”

As he spoke, an explosion could be heard in the distance.

The richest man in the world stood up and bowed. “It has been my pleasure to do business with you.”

There was another explosion. Even closer this time.

The richest man in the world walked out of the room, closing the door gently behind him.

Santa Claus reached out for the phone at the edge of his desk. It was twenty feet away from his chair, so he had to get up and walk.

He picked up the receiver.

It was three days before Christmas and Christmas was in trouble.

Who ya gonna call?



www.iggyyugoandsam.com