

Father Christmas Re-locates  
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## Dramatis Personae, in order of speaking

*Father Christmas*, CEO of Father Christmas Enterprises (a.k.a. 'Santa')

*Arthur*, shop steward of the Elves Union

*Rudolph (Rudy)*, oldest and most experienced of Santa's team of reindeer; later, member of the reindeer's barber's shop quartet

*Passport official at Auckland International Airport*

*Immigration Officer*

*Customs Officer*

*Biosecurity Officer*

*Jack Sprat*, one of the elves, joke writer from the 'special unit'.

*Bert*, another elf from the 'special unit', who deals with finance.

*Prancer*, one of the reindeer, member of the barber's shop quartet

*Blitzen*, another reindeer, member of the barber's shop quartet

*Comet*, another reindeer, the fittest, strongest and most agile of the reindeer team

*Cupid*, another reindeer

*Donner*, another reindeer

*Alf*, another elf, technical expert

*Bobby*, youngest of the elves

*Jim*, one of the cleverest of the elves from the 'special unit', specialist in 'technology transfer'

*Alan*, elf with IT skills

*Tom*, elf, public relations expert

*Dasher*, another reindeer

*Vixen*, another reindeer, member of the barber's shop quartet



*June, 2008; a bright sunny day at the North Pole. Father Christmas is in his office in earnest discussion with one of his helpers.*

“What’s this, Arthur? ‘Industrial action’?” Father Christmas groans. “Over Christmas, this year, you say? You can’t go on strike! You’re an elf!”

“That we can, Bah Gum! Its mid-summer nah” says the chief elf coolly. “We’re givin’ yuh due warnin’. Six months. We want triple time for workin’ unsorsh’able hours! and we want thermal underwear for all elves, an’ all!”

“Jeepers, Arthur! As if I haven’t enough to worry about. Just look at today’s mail for instance. I can cope with all the world’s gift requests - No problem; that’s part of the job. There’ll be a few difficulties, such as getting wee Calvin a flame thrower; and we’re running out of plastic replica AK47s. Still that’s all standard stuff. But look at this lot. First we have this letter from the F.C.F.O. - the Father Christmas Funding Organization. They’re threatening to reduce our annual grant; and worse, they talk of deregulating our funding, making it contestable. Then we’ve got this sweet message from the Chimney Clearance Authority - they’re reducing clearance by two centimetres from 2009. That means I’ll have to lose weight”

“You’re given due notice. Everyone else at North Pole gets Christmas off. All except us! If we don’t get us demands, we’re walkin’ off’t job, 23rd December, this year. That’s our ultimatum. See if we dorn’t!”

“You seem to think its easy being C.E.O. of ‘Father Christmas Enterprises’. You’ve never had to go down chimneys, choking with soot on drizzly

mid-winter nights in Scunthorpe and Wigan. You've never had to cope with grumpy reindeers when there's a sledge-full of presents to get down under to Melbourne or Cape Town. And to top it all, just look at the letter I got this morning. It's from a guy calling himself George W.Bush. Let me read you a bit.

'It has come to our notice that each year you and yer . . . rorganization make reglar international air trips without proper securidy checks. In the past we have misunderestimated the threat ter vital national interests posed by such unreglated migration. We ah . . . ralso aware that some of yer visits are made ter . . . rogue states which pose serious threats tuh . . . U.S. national interests, and that yuh . . . distribute donations widely . . . which may contribute tuh . . . military hardware capability in these rogue states. We do not wanna . . . rundermine the good work yuh do, but it is imperative in the present global securidy environment that in the future yuh.. comply fully with international anti-terror reglations. . . Therefore, as from first December of this year we require yer . . . to send all yer goods distributed from yer . . . North Pole Office through our military base in Iceland . . . fer securidy screening. We apologize for the inconvenience this will cause, but trust yuh. . . will realize the urgency of the situation. Our Global Freight Monitoring Office will be contacting yuh shortly, tuh make necessary arrangements.'"

Father Christmas puts down the letter and sighs. The chief elf looks bored, and shrugs his shoulders. "So yuh've nowt' more to say 'baht unсорshable workin' hours and thermal underwear, eh? OK That settles it. From now on yuh'll have to deal with us through t' Polar Employment Disputes Tribunal."

The chief elf turns to go, and leaves the office, slamming the door behind him. There is a shudder, as though the ground is giving way. Father Christmas picks up his cell-phone and anxiously dials a familiar number.

"That you, Rudolph?"

"Sure thing, buddy!"

"Listen, I've got real problems over here. The chief elf is threatening strike action next season."

"Yep, buddy, I've heard all the gossip. All about triple time for working unsociable hours - No way! That was never part of the contract. But about thermal underwear - he's got a point you know, Santa. I remember on my very first Christmas run how I nearly caught my death of cold. Remember? They even made a song about it."

"OK, Rudolph, I do remember. No need to rub it in. But then I get this letter from a man calling himself George W.Bush. Seems like some big-shot of an American. Ever heard of him?"

"Sure buddy, he's President of the United States of America and England. What's he got to say?"

"Lot of big talk about 'global security environment' and 'international anti-terror regulations'.

"Sure buddy, but why is he writing to you? What does he want? A present or something? We

could send him a set of the new 'Global Strategy' Board Game - It's called 'Hegemony'”

“No, it's nothing like that. He wants us to have all our presents - all of them, I mean - screened at his Global Freight Monitoring Office in Iceland.”

“What! That's really serious, buddy. If we're to do that, it means we have to get the whole operation moving a month earlier than usual. We'll have to get the plan finalized each year by mid-November, not mid-December.”

“But we don't get the gift requests finalized until late November. It's a no-go.”

“You're right, Santa. You know what that means? If we have to follow that advice, we can't operate from the North Pole any more. We gotta relocate, Santa!”

“You ain't joking! Hold on a bit! Let's think that through.”

“We need somewhere far away from U.S. of A.

“So what do you suggest?”

“What about the *South* Pole?”

“Forget it Rudy. I've seen some of their promotion material. Its pretty rugged. Let me read you a bit” Santa rummages through a filing cabinet, and comes out with a small glossy brochure, from which he reads: 'Recommended only for travelers with long experience of extreme polar winters. Bring provisions for at least six months. Safety not guaranteed.' Doesn't seem much of a place for an expanding modern global enterprise to set up its head office. Employment of office staff would be pretty difficult. The elves union would never buy into it. But I've another brochure here - a place long way from Iceland, long way from U.S.A. - ever heard of a place called New Zealand?”

“I’ve heard of it, Santa. Isn’t it a little island somewhere off of Australia?”

“Yep - but more civilized, I’ve heard. And with an independent foreign policy, they say.”

“Seems interesting. Have you got any briefing on the place?”

“I think so. Let me search through my files.”

“Do that, buddy. I’ll come right over.”

“See ya soon”.

Father Christmas settles down to check his e-mails. First there are two from the Chimney Clearance Authority. The first is entitled portentously: “O.E.C.D. Report on Chimneys: International Comparisons”. Father Christmas sighs, clicks on the website, and scans quickly down the list of contents. He sees tables for all O.E.C.D. countries on “Chimneys per capita”, “Mean chimney height”, “Mean chimney width”, “Mean depth of soot deposits”, “Proportion of chimneys not meeting C.C.A. Health and Safety Regulations”. He sighs again, and opens the next e-mail from the C.C.A. The message reads:

“We have received notification from the Federal Government of United States of America and England, that, as a result of the global security situation, their authorities are considering adding to their databases a security profile of all chimneys. They are proposing to collect a comprehensive list of names, addresses and G.P.S. coordinates of all chimneys, world-wide. The apparent justification for this is to improve surveillance capability, so as to limit the security threats posed by possible charlatan Father Christmases. We



realize that this new development may be seen as a serious threat to long-established traditions in your organization. Therefore we ask for your comments on this proposal, which is still under discussion. We require your feedback by the end of the month.”

Father Christmas’s forehead twists into deep furrows, and he scratches his head. “Well, I *can* see their point - and it’d be easy to do. We’ve got all that data on our files. But . . .” He scratches his head again. His face twitches and starts to turn red, and then, in a moment of decision he bangs his fist on the table top.

“Wait a moment! Nope! I won’t do it! If we were to down-load our chimney location files, who knows what might happen to the data? Might get into the wrong hands - and - we’re now in a competitive environment. Deregulation means that, quite soon, there may be lots of fly-by-night Father Christmas operations setting up, all over the world. You never know how secure their I.T. systems are. All that data might be down-loaded to bogus Father Christmases. I won’t do it! No way!”

He bangs his fist on the table again; the floor seems to shudder again. But, with the decision taken, Father Christmas relaxes a bit.

Just then, the sound of reindeer hoofs is heard, pounding over the arctic ice. There is a knock at Father Christmas’s office door, and in comes Rudolph, a little out of breath. He shuts the door behind him. Again the office seems to shake.

“Come and look at this, Rudy”, says Father Christmas, deliberately striking a calm pose.

despite his recent agitation. Rudolph takes a seat beside his mate, in front of the P.C. screen. They do a google search on “New Zealand”, and come up with pictures of beautiful landscapes, snow-capped mountains, serene lakes, empty beaches, forests, volcanoes, hot pools and lots more.

“Looks pretty cool” says Rudolph. “Seems like there are two big islands, and lots of little ones.”

“That’s right” says Father Christmas, I remember it from the very early days. . . years and years ago, when I was a kid, with me old man. . .and then, later on, we did some proper Christmas runs, once I’d got the business going . . .though I was usually pretty knackered by that time on the runs, so I don’t remember too much. Rather narrow chimneys down there, I seem to remember too. . . and some of the reindeers had difficulty on the journey over from Australia. Big mountain range. Air a bit thin. Don’t think you ever did that part of the run, did you?”

“No, I’ve usually been on the Northern hemisphere section of the run” admits Rudolph.

“But let’s look up what they say under ‘immigration’”

They study the website together for a few minutes.

“Look, there’s a ‘points’ system. Let’s see how we get on.”

“Age. . .say Santa, how old *are* you actually?”

“Not quite sure, Rudy, but the immigration people would never believe me anyway, so let’s skip that one.”

“Dependents?”

“I suppose that means the elves, though most of them are capable of looking after themselves. . . financially, I mean.”

“Health?”

“No problems”

“Skills? Education?”

“Oh we do well there. You and your team all are highly qualified airline pilots. Bit unconventional way of flying p'raps, but - y'never know, they might like it. And the elves - all pretty innovative, well educated, dynamic bunch, I'd say; though they're a bit hard to take just at present, when the elves union gets the upper hand.”

“Business experience?”

“We'd score pretty well on that too. After all, I *am* CEO of the oldest multinational of them all. Hundreds, even thousands of years experience.”

“Venture capital?”

“That's a bit harder. You know how our business works - same as it has for hundreds of years. It's never really been based much on money. . . but mainly on good will. So, we've never had to pay taxes, never had to worry about accountants, or their fees. It's all based on *trust*. Everyone knows who we are; they know we *always deliver the goods*; and so we always get plenty in return. Often it's just a glass of scotch, before we go back up the chimney, or some mince pies, or ginger biscuits, or a bag of oats for the reindeer. . . but, *you know - but y'know it's not widely known*” (here Father Christmas winks at Rudolph) “that we also deliver the goods to the big corporates, and then. . . well. . . then we get real big bikkies in return there - all tax free of course. They all know we're the best, the

most widely respected brand-name world-wide, and have been for hundreds of years. None of them would dare get off-side with us - it'd cripple their own marketing strategy within a few weeks. You can't criticize Father Christmas any more than you can criticize apple pie . . . and then, of course, recently, we've had *some* financial help from the F.C.F.O, but that's becoming a bit unreliable if they decide to make their funding contestable. . .still, we got a big donation from Bill Gates last week, and another from FEDEX. Actually, I think FEDEX's board would like to make a takeover bid, except their own shareholders would desert them in droves."

"OK, Santa, so in that slot we could just put in 'infinite good will, world-wide'."

"Sure"

"References?"

"Oh, that's easy. Send out an e-mail, to all our mailing list, especially the under-tens, and ask them to write to the New Zealand immigration authorities in support. They'll be swamped with tens of thousands of messages of support within days."

"Seems we'd qualify then?"

"Not a shadow of doubt, Rudy"

"OK, but before we go any further we'd better bring the elves into the loop."

Rudolph works away at his cell 'phone and soon there is a patter of tiny feet, as the elves congregate outside the office door. There is a brisk knock, and chief elf, Arthur, enters, looking stern, as usual, but also curious as to what Father Christmas has to offer, after their recent altercation.

"Listen, Arthur" begins Father Christmas, with a conciliatory tone, "We're in discussion

about a real *big change* . . . makes your 'industrial action' seem like small change actually. . . . We're planning to relocate the whole business."

"Bah Gum! That *is* big. . . . Weer to, Santa?"

"Ever heard of this place?" Father Christmas hands Arthur some of the brochures they were studying.

"New Zealand! Bugger me!"

"Tell me what you think."

"Sounds all reight! Good place for me and me mates. . . . and look 'ere . . . they 'ave Christmas at mid-summer."

"Awesome!"

"Suits me fine . . . and it'll suit t'other elfs in't union, I'll be bound. They'll prob'ly drop their demand for thermal underwear. Still, we 'ave look at this carefully, wi' our eyes wide open, eh? I've 'eard it's a pretty backward place, isn't it. . . . Look at U.S.A. Look at Russia. They put men into space, men on't moon. Never 'eard owt like that 'baht New Zealand."

"But New Zealand has it's own space program too" Santa breaks in. "It says so in this brochure - it's something called 'bungy jumping'. Their launch pad is in 'Central Otago', wherever that is."

The chief elf studies some of the other literature, and, a moment later, suddenly bursts out in excitement: "Hey, Santa, did yuh see this 'ere?" He points to a sentence in one of the brochures. " 'Christmas day starts 12 hours early compared to most of Europe, and nearly 24 hours early compared to North America.' Know what that means Santa? It means we can do most of our business down under before they even GET to Christmas eve in our main centres. That's a damn

sight easier. Just my barra'. I'll settle for New Zealand any day. . . 'Course, I'll have check it out wi' me mates on't shop floor, before I give you a definite 'yes', but ah reckon it'll be OK."

Arthur goes outside, and there is a long pause, occasionally broken by exclamations.

Father Christmas, always thinking ahead, as a top C.E.O. should, picks up the 'phone, while Rudolph helps himself to coffee.

"Hello, is that the C.C.A."

A recorded message answers, in an Indian accent.

"Hello. This is the Chimney Clearance Authority, International Office, New Delhi. Your call may be recorded for quality and training purposes. If your call is about CCA affairs in Europe press '1', North America, press '2', South America, press '3', Middle East, press '4', Indian subcontinent, press '5', Far east, press '6', Arctic region, press '7'"

Father Christmas, irritated, presses '7'".

"Hello, Arctic CCA division. If your call is about employment with CCA, press '1'; chimney planning applications, press '2'; OECD chimney clearance league table, press '3'; chimney sweep services, press '4'; chimney sweep-stake, press '5'; CCA Occupational Health and Safety regulations, press '6'; CCA Publications, press 7; Forthcoming legal developments, press '8'.

Father Christmas, wearily, presses '8'.

"For information about the new regulations for the green house gas-o-meter scheme, press '1'; forthcoming changes to the Chimney Clearance regulations, press '2'.

Father Christmas, now getting a little interested, presses '2'.

A non-descript automatic voice answers:

"Thank you for your patience. A member of

C.C.A. staff will be with you shortly.” At this point, canned music intervenes. Father Christmas recognizes ‘I’m dreaming of a white Christmas’, and groans. Periodically, over the next fifteen minutes, the canned music is interrupted by a different automatic voice advertising package holidays in the Caribbean island of Sans Serif, with “Book now!; Environmentally friendly travel to the secluded, far-away, idyllic island of Sans Serif. Don’t hold your breath; but, minimize your carbon emissions. Book now! You can be sure you will be getting the very best deals.”

Suddenly, the succession of canned music and automatic advertising is interrupted by an urgent, fast-talking voice, again automatic. “As from First January 2009, the International Regulation Authority of the Chimney Clearance Authority has decreed that the universal standard chimney diameter will be decreased from 35 centimeters to 33 centimeters, the only exceptions being for domestic dwellings with more than 500 inhabitants, tropical sauna baths and . . .”

“Can you slow down a bit?”

“Certainly sir”

Then again, at exactly half the speed: “As from First January 2009, the International Regulation Authority of the Chimney Clearance Authority has decreed that the universal standard chimney diameter will be decreased from 35 centimeters to 33 centimeters, the only exceptions being for domestic dwellings with more than 500 inhabitants, tropical . . .”

Father Christmas, now quite frustrated, breaks in: “Can I speak to a person?”

“Certainly sir. Male or female?”

“Male”

“Preferred regional accent? You may choose from ‘Southern England, Australian, Scottish, Yorkshire . . .’”

“That’ll suit me fine. Good old Yorkshire accent!”

“Nah then; what’s getting thah goat, eh?”

“Well, I wanted to find more about the changes to the chimney clearance regulations. Can you tell me how it applies to the international operations of Father Christmas, every year on December the . . .”

At this point a loud kettle can be heard over the ‘phone, whistling vigorously, as it comes to the boil.

“Hello?” says Father Christmas. “Can you hear me. I’m Father Christmas, CEO of Father Christmas Enterprises. Can you help me about our business requirements?”

“Thah MUST be jorking! We’ve just mashed!”\* Father Christmas slams down the ‘phone, in disgust.

At this moment, there is excited cheering coming from outside the door of Father Christmas’s office. Arthur, shop steward of the elf’s union comes back in again.

“Let’s do it Santa!” he says, flushed with excitement.

“It’s a deal. Let’s go to New Zealand” says Santa.

“It’s a deal”. Rudolph joins in the agreement.

The three of them shake hands, and they go outside. Soon there is wild excitement, and a party begins. Rudolph and Arthur start an excited quickstep, to the tune of “Rudolph the red-nosed

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\* In Yorkshire, no-one brews or infuses tea; they ‘mash’ tea, a ceremony before which everything else must halt.



reindeer.” Suddenly, as the ground shakes to their dancing, there is a loud crack, and the office, complete with computers, files, and Father Christmas’s favorite working desk, slips slowly downwards, quite out of sight, disappearing, irretrievably, in a minute or two, into the icy depths of the Arctic ocean below, with nothing but a few splashes of icy salt water showing that it has all gone for good. There is consternation, but just for a moment; and then Father Christmas, decisive as ever, as expected of the CEO of the world’s oldest and most prestigious multinational organization, recovers his composure, with the historic words “Well, I guess that really settles it fellas! Global warming forces our hand! We’ve no choice now. New Zealand, here we come!”

But he pauses. . . . A shadow of deep anxiety passes over his face. He puts his hand on his forehead in a moment’s hard thought, and then, a broad smile growing on his face, he pulls from his breast pocket his memory stick, which he brandishes in triumph:

“Still got all the files, all the mailing lists! Backed up ten minutes ago. We’re all OK fellas!”

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It is late August. An airbus has just arrived at Auckland Airport’s new international terminal. Father Christmas, accompanied by nine reindeer and sixteen elves are waiting at the passport check.

“Quite a big party with you Mr. . is it Mr Christmas?”

“*Father Christmas*”

“Father Christmas, eh? Strange name. You belong to some religious sect?”

“Not really”

“‘Father Christmas’ eh? But that’s what you’ve put down as your *occupation*.”

“That’s right too.”

“Seems a bit fishy to me. Just a moment let me check. . . .You . . .You’ve put down as your place of birth ‘Turkey’; and for your date of birth you’ve written ‘about 270’ - that’s a bit of a mistake isn’t it? . . .and it’s really just a wee bit too *vague*, isn’t it?”

“No - it’s right on, mate. They didn’t have birth certificates in Turkey in those days y’know.”

“Turkey eh? Say, Mr Christmas, does the name ‘Bin Laden’ mean anything to you”

“No. Don’t know who that could be - though I’ve bin laden myself many times. Part of the job, y’know. But, about that form I filled in on the plane, they do reckon I was born around the year 270. That’s straight on.”

“Yes, right! . . .You really don’t expect to pull that one over on me, do you! That’d make you about 1740 years old by now. You’re a senior citizen, I know - but you don’t look quite *that* old, Mr Christmas, if you don’t mind my saying so.”

“Oh, it’s quite healthy, living up at the North Pole.”

“Pull the other leg!”

“It’s right on, y’know.”

“Just a moment . . .I’ve got some more info coming up on the computer. They say you have an alias, go under another name. Are you also known as S. Claus? I’m really starting to smell a rat

here, if you don't mind my saying so, Mr Christmas"

"Oh sure, I'm also known as S. Claus. That's my trading name in the U.S.A."

"I still don't believe it. You're pulling a fast one on me. . . Say matey." The passport official, leaning over the desk for a confidential word in Father Christmas' ear, is getting really earnest now, ". . . who are you *really?*"

"Father Christmas. . . I told you. . . also known as Santa Claus. If you don't believe it, do a google on me."

After a few minutes searching, a dazed look comes over the official's face.

"Look matey; I've got here an entry on Wikipedia, for someone calling himself 'Saint Nicholas', born in the south of Turkey around the year 270, known for making secret gifts. Also known as Santa Claus. Wikipedia never said that this guy actually ever died. Could be still alive. *Is that you, mate?*"

"Sure thing, mate! But, of course, the business has grown quite a bit over the last few centuries."

He hands the official his calling card with the name "Father Christmas, CEO, Father Christmas Enterprises, North Pole."

"Awesome! I'm stoked. I'd never have believed it. . . But what about all these other guys?"

"Oh, that's my team of PAs, that is nine reindeer, and sixteen elves."

"Uh-oh! I think there might be just another little problem here, Mr Christmas. Are elves people? I'd better check that one with the immigration authorities."

The passport clerk disappears, and comes back five minutes later accompanied by another official carrying a large leather-bound loose-leaf folder.

“It says here” began the immigration official in an important-sounding way, following the relevant paragraph with his finger “that an elf is a person who is short with pointy ears, and hobbits are also people who are short with big hairy feet. We’ve got lots of hobbits in Aotearoa - we’re very inclusive. If hobbits are people, so are elves! . . . So it’s really no problem, mate” he says to the passport clerk, who, looking somewhat abashed mutters under his breath “Can’t be too careful these days”.

The immigration official, continuing, says to Father Christmas and his group: “We don’t mind elves at all in New Zealand, so long as they pass the bio-security check. We have small communities of elves in some cities, and we also have a few support groups for new arrivals.”

“Well then” the Passport Official concludes, as the immigration officer retreats out of sight, “Welcome to New Zealand, mate. Here’s all your passports back. All your group are welcome. Good luck in Godzone!”

Next they come to the customs check. “So you claim to be Father Christmas, eh? What are you bringing into the country?”

“Traveling pretty light at this time of the year, actually. But, come mid-November, we’re expecting to receive quite a lot of things for checking before the Christmas run.”

“You’ll have to get them cleared by customs, when they come into the country, you realize?”

“Sure, those are things we’re quite used to in November. . . but we don’t want to have to do

it all again for out-going stuff in December, just before the Christmas run. We won't have to, will we?" pleads Father Christmas.

The customs official looks a bit nonplused.

"You'll have quite a lot to get posted overseas, I'd guess?"

"No, actually, we never post it. Not reliable enough. We run our own special courier service in December."

"Look". The official has suddenly become quite helpful. "Give me your contact details and we'll get in touch with you. This looks like quite a big deal for the export market . . . could be a rival to Fontera."

Next they come to the Biosecurity check. The official here has a very hard uncompromising look on his face.

"I see from your card that you've got some boots in your luggage."

"Sure have. How d'y think we get about at the North Pole?"

"*Muddy boots?*"

"Nope - there's no mud at the north pole . . . not a bit".

"I'll believe it. Any radiation, nuclear, atomic stuff"

"Not a problem, mate. No atoms in the whole of the North Pole."

At this point there is an interjection from one of the elves, Jack Sprat by name. He is small, intense, and intelligent-looking.

"Hey mate, can't you chill out a bit, eh? Our job is to lighten things up a bit. You aren't helping much. You know, you really cramp my style, buddy." The official is not amused.

“Say, mate”, continued the elf, quite unfazed, “‘What did the matador say when he went into Starbucks?’”

The official looks bored. “I don’t know. What DID the matador say when he went into Starbucks?”

“Cafe OLÉ!”

“Listen here, you, joker, I’ve got a serious job to. . .”

“He didn’t get it! Let me try another one. ‘I say, I say, I say: ‘Waiter this egg’s bad! . . .’. . . ‘Don’t blame me. I only laid the *table*’” There is a blank stare from the official.

“Get it? Get it? He didn’t get it. The waiter laid the table, but he didn’t lay the egg! See? Get it?”

At this point Father Christmas, seeing an increasingly severe, even savage look on the official’s face, intervenes with “You must forgive my colleague’s light hearted banter . . . He’s part of the ‘special unit’ of Father Christmas Enterprises. It’s his job to develop all the jokes in Christmas Crackers. So, making jokes is his very honorable profession. He’s very highly trained - MBA from Harvard - and he takes it all *very seriously*. . . and of course, he has to test all his new product in real-life situations. That’s what he’s doing now. It’s an important part of his market research. I hope you understand”

Hearing the words “market research” the official seems somewhat placated. “Market research, eh? OK mate, in that case, I guess I’ll have to make some allowances. But I’ve got to ask you some other serious questions. How many reindeers are there in your party?”

“Nine”

“I’m afraid we’ll have to keep them in quarantine for six weeks.”

“What! The immigration authorities never told me about that.”

“Oh, small slip-up I guess. We only have a small embassy at the North Pole.”

“But they’re my best buddies.”

“Quarantine for reindeers is compulsory - foot and mouth, y’know - that’s biosecurity regulations. We’re very strict about it here. Just imagine what it would do to our economy if some of those viruses from the North Pole got loose amongst our native pigeons”.

“There are NO viruses at the North Pole”. Father Christmas was adamant.

“Let me consult my regulations book”

After ten minutes the official comes back. “We hear that ten years ago there was a severe outbreak of reindeer flu, at the North Pole, and it spread quickly to other parts of the world, just after Christmas. Pretty dangerous strain it was, they reckon, according to our data base.” In the background, Rudolph, overhears this, and is seen blushing scarlet. He remembers his very first Christmas run.

“B-b-but that was ten year’s ago” stammers Father Christmas.

“I AM sorry Mr Christmas, but those are the regulations. There is no vaccine against Reindeer flu. Six weeks quarantine, at the very least, will still be required. . . .and we’ll have to do some DNA screening at the end of the period, just to be on the safe side.

“But where will Rudolph and the other eight stay all that time?”

“Oh, we’ve got a nice little island out in the harbour.”

“But I’m wanting them to help me set up my new business”.

Once again, the official suddenly seems more sympathetic. “No probs mate, actually. . .we’re quite used to that sort of thing. . .Tell you what. . .since you’re in the entrepreneur class, we’ll give your reindeers business class accommodation on the island . . they’ll have round-the-clock internet and e-mail access. It’s quite cosy. Spa baths, cell phones provided free.... and there might be more”. He gives Father Christmas a suggestive nudge. “Know what I mean, eh?”

In the background Rudolph overhears, and pricks up his ears. “Listen to that Donner! That sounds pretty cool!” he whispers to his mate.

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September 2008. A small first floor room in a suburban house in Timaru. There are boxes stacked all around, a coffee jug simmering, perched precariously amid the disorganized belongings, a tiny desk space, and a PC. Father Christmas pours himself a cup, and then sits down in front of the PC, to check his e-mails. The first is from Rudolph, who, with the other eight reindeer is coming to the end of their quarantine period, on the quarantine island in Auckland harbour. Santa reads Rudolph’s message over to himself. “We were getting pretty bored up here, actually, Santa, but then we had a great idea: Me, along with Blitzen, Prancer and Vixen - we’ve started a barber’s shop quartet. Our first gig is in two days time for all the other folk in quarantine . . . But we should be out of here in a week, with a bit of luck.”



Father Christmas writes back. "That sounds great, Rudy! Keep it up. I'm setting up a little office in a place called Timaru - it's way down south. I thought you and the team would get on better down here. Big mountains not far off, and glaciers and snow. Thought you'd like it. When you get off the island, I'll come up to meet you. We can drive down together, just like old times, eh?"

The next e-mail is from one of the elves, Bert, in the special unit dealing with finance. He seems quite pleased with himself. "You wrote to say funds were getting a bit low, Santa. I've found a neat website called 'Trade me'. Should solve the problem soon. We don't need all those snow shoes and thermal underwear in this place. But there are plenty of people who'll pay big bucks for that sort of stuff. Sounds like they're mountaineers. . . And me and the other elves have been looking around. We need quite different footwear here. On the beech they need things called 'jandals'. . . and if they're going off into the country, it can get pretty muddy, so I want to equip them all with things called 'gumboots'. Plenty of them advertised on 'Trade me', and, we can pay for them from sale of the other stuff, and make a bit of profit."

Santa writes back "Good work. We could make good use 'Trade me', later on."

The third message is from George W. Bush. "Since yer did not respond tuh our message of last month, we have decided ter . . . ecommend that you and yer . . . rorganization be denied access ter. . . the USA, as illegal aliens, starting from Dec 15th this year. Sincerely, George Dubya Bush."



A week later, Santa and a team of four reindeer, just released from quarantine, take to the Great South Road, down through the centre of the North Island, and on towards Cook Strait. They stop for a breather at Taumaranui.

“Jee, Santa” says Prancer, “It sure is good to get some exercise again, after being cooped up on the island for six weeks”.

“Sure is” confirms Blitzen “. . . and the roads, nice and quiet, we can get up quite a good lick, eh? - and the scenery - those big mountains we passed, looks like a real volcano. Pretty cool, eh?”

“Wait ‘til we get fit again” says Comet “We’ll really show ‘em. Be good when we’re in good enough shape to get airborne.”

“Sure thing” says Rudolph. “We’ll all have to get in good trim for the Christmas run. Only three months away, and so much to do, getting the new business in operation.”

“Where are we heading for, when we get south of Cook Strait, Santa?” says Cupid.

“I’ve been scouting out some of the country inland from Timaru. Found a nice wee valley, secluded, bush not too thick, you can easily get up to the mountains, but not too steep. I think you’ll like it.”

%%%%%%%%%

It’s early October, in the meeting room of the Timaru Rotary Club. Father Christmas has arranged a business meeting for the whole team of all elves and all reindeers, to sort out questions about settling into the new country, and planning the next Christmas run.

“Morning all!”, he begins. “Sorry we can’t be meeting in our own rooms. The local Rotary let us have this free-of-charge. I think they know we’ll be an asset to the Timaru business community. They’re encouraging us to stay. I thought we all ought to get together, to sort out any problems, and to plan the next few months. Before long, if we do well, we’ll have our own offices - p’raps even next time we meet.”

“First thing to tell you is that me and the reindeer team - we all got a speeding ticket, when we came down from Auckland. Stern little letter from the police. \$70 fine. Have to be more careful in future. . . and they told me several other things. If we’re to use public roads, we’ll need a number plate on the sledge. I’ll fix that up soon; oh, and reindeer sledges are not allowed on motorways. OK - Got it Rudy? Got it Donner”

“Yep; We got it” they both understand. “But” continues Rudolph “when we’re a bit fitter, we won’t need land transport anyway. Can’t wait to be airborne again!”

“The other thing they told me is that reindeer should wear crash helmets. Recent Ministry of Transport ruling.”

“They’ve got a point”, broke in one of the reindeer called Cupid. “What’d me mates think if I broke one of the points off me antlers. . . to say nothing of the shielas.”

“OK Cupid”

Another reindeer, Comet, breaks in “But where do we get crash helmets that would fit? Haven’t seen anything at all suitable in the local cycle shops. I don’t think they make them for reindeer yet.”

“I know what we could do, Comet”. This was one of the elves, named Alf. “I met a great guy

when we were up in Auckland. Student at a local Uni - AUT - Auckland University of Technology. He was looking for a good project for a Master's thesis. Something that would make money - export potential - you know."

"Seems a great idea" added Father Christmas.

"Get him onto it, quick."

"Will do!" say Alf.

"Right. Next thing. Rudolph, you and your mates: Tell me? How's that valley you moved into two weeks ago?"

"I'm a bit worried, actually Santa. There may be hunters come there from time to time."

"Really? That is a worry. How d'you know? Have you seen any?"

"No, not yet. But I've seen a number of spent cartridge cases. We need to be somewhere more remote."

"OK. Point made. I'll look into it; though it might not be too easy. If you go somewhere more remote, e-mail access might be a problem. But I'll see what I can do. . . ."

"Next item on the agenda: Our finances aren't looking too good. What's the latest, Bert?"

"Pretty thin at the moment Santa. We've never had to do deficit financing before, but we might have to before Christmas run."

"OK. Thanks Alf. I suggest each of you develop your own business plan. I know some of you have had some ideas already. Let's hear them."

One of the junior elves, Bobby by name, sticks up his hand and says "I saw an advertisement in one of the newspapers for something called a 'Fart Tax Inspector' . . .part of the efforts of the Department of Conservation

to reduce the country's greenhouse gas emissions - eliminate global warming - so they say."

"Um. m . m . Nice try. But it's not quite the image we want to project, you know."

Next one of the reindeers, Blitzen, puts up a hoof. "I've been up to the Mount Cook Village. When we're fit enough to get airborne, we could set up a cool business taking people up to the high glaciers, or doing supply drops to remote valleys, for people on long tramps."

"Brilliant! Go for it Blitzen!"

The third suggestion is from another of the elves, Jim, from the 'special unit'. "I'd heard an idea when I was up in Auckland to develop a new form of bubble wrap envelope - helium-filled - that's the key to it. It's supposed to reduce the cost of postage. The guy who told me of it couldn't believe it would ever be marketable"

"Now there's an idea with some potential if it's worked up properly. Try developing it. Let me know your ideas next time we meet".

"OK"

"Right-oh. Next item: We've really got to get our business here moving. At the North Pole, this was the time of the year when we started to get our orders in. We've got to adapt, fast, or we'll never survive against the competition."

Another of the elves Alan, speaks up: "Santa, what we need is a really good website . . with good marketing, and the possibility for everyone to order their gifts on-line."

"What a great idea. Can you set it up?"

"Sure can! Can't wait. I'll start this afternoon."

"Fine. What an enterprising lot we all are! Next item: We've all got to get to know the local culture. Got to understand the local religion.

‘Father Christmas Enterprises’ was always closely linked with local religious festivals, right from the earliest days.”

“Isn’t there something here called ‘Rugby’?” suggests an elf, Tom. “They have regular ceremonies, in great big open-air ceremonial grounds. Not like any church I’ve seen. Then they get their biggest strongest fellas, and stage some sort of battle. Commemorating some war, long ago, I ‘spose.”

“Who’d like to investigate it?”

Another reindeer, Dasher, puts up his hoof: “I’ll do it.”

“Fine, Dasher. You work along with Tom. Right, now the last thing, for the reindeer team: Our heavy-duty sledges have been coming by surface. They’ve arrived in Auckland, I hear, and we’ll be getting them delivered next week. Need to get them overhauled in plenty of time for the Christmas run. But you nine - you’ve got to be getting in trim. We’ve got to have regular training sessions. You happy to supervise, Rudy?”

“Sure thing, Santa!”

“OK, that’s all we’ve got to deal with now. Next meeting, fortnight from now? Same time? OK. See you all then.”

The meeting breaks up, full of optimism, and the elves and reindeer disperse.

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Two weeks later, in mid October, Father Christmas chairs the next meeting.

“OK folks. Just a short meeting, because I know you’re all pretty busy. First, the heavy duty sledges have arrived in Timaru, and they’re at the workshops in town, being overhauled. Rudy

- thanks for your hard work - your team are getting into good shape. [to the others:] I should say I was at their last training session. They hit 100 k, and were getting airborne. Looks great! But a little way to go before we're ready. Anything more to report, Rudy?"

"Ask Blitzen"

Blitzen explains: "Oh, we've made some progress up at Mount Cook village. We've shown them how the team can help in the Alps - tourist flights up to the high glaciers, food drops for trappers in remote valleys - they even talk about alpine rescue missions. I reckon we'll be more versatile on steep mountain slopes than the regular helicopters. We're just about to sign a contract actually, once they've seen us in action at high altitude."

"That's just great, Blitzen. Oh yes - one other point: Dasher, Tom - did you find anything out about the local religion - Rugby, or something, isn't it called?"

Dasher responds: "Sure thing, Santa. It IS a religion, but it's also a bit like a sport, with teams competing, and they actually have some rules to the competition - I think so, at any rate, but you'd never guess."

"Tell me more."

"Well, last Saturday, me, Rudy, me and Vixen were allowed to take part in one of their 'games', as they called them. We blew them away. They'd never seen such speed and determination! They want us to join their club."

"Fantastic!"

"But there ARE one or two problems, Santa."

"Oh?"

"It's our antlers. They said they are not allowed, according to official rules."



“So what do they suggest?”

“Two possibilities: First we’ll need special protective headgear.”

“Well, AUT has been designing that for us, hasn’t it?”

“Sure thing” broke in Alf. “I’ve got the prototype here. First production model due in a week’s time.”

“OK. What’s the other possibility?”

“Well, they do talk about changing the rules - on the whole they think that reindeer have an unfair advantage - so they’re also thinking of developing a whole new set of rules, just for reindeer, which they’ll call the RRFU - the Reindeer’s Rugby Football Union.”

“That’s very obliging of them.”

“Actually they’ll do almost anything in the name of their religion. But it’ll all have to be approved at the highest level. You’ll have to go up to Wellington, Santa, to sort it out with the PM.”

“That’s fine. I’ll get it arranged. Now - another item: What happened about the helium-filled bubble-wrap?”

At this point, Jim, from the ‘special unit’ steps forward, holding a medium-size envelope in his hands. He lets go of his load, and it is seen by all to float gently up to the ceiling, until retrieved by the long length of fine thread to which it is attached. “There you are - the very first prototype of the new model” says Jim, proudly, taking a little bow. There is applause all round.

“Magnificent!” says Santa. “When does the large-scale production start?”

“Two weeks from now, once we get the production line finalized”

“Given any thought to the marketing?”

“Oh, sure. We’re marketing it on-line; and we’ll go on TV, once we’ve made a little profit. We’ll sell it all by weight.”

“How much will you charge per kilogram?”

“Minus ten dollars per kg; advertised with the slogan ‘never knowingly undersold!’”

“You’ll need a good catchy name for your new business. Given any thought to that?”

“Well we’re thinking of calling it ‘Bubble-wrap solutions’. Seems about right - you never know - there could be any number of problems we can solve, once we’ve mastered the new technology, and got the production solved.”

“OK. That’s all coming along fine. You obviously don’t need any help from me - but keep me informed.”

“Next item, again it’s for the reindeer. After our last meeting I found a nice wee valley for you to be located in, not too remote. No hunters ever likely to go there. But there is one snag - it’s Maori land, owned by Ngai Tahu, and they’re seeking planning permission to put a gondola through it. Green party oppose it. But the minister of tourism gives the plan full support. So . . . you can move there right away, but it might just be temporary.”

“Look Santa”, comes in another of the reindeer, Blitzen again. “We can do much better than a gondola; much more environmentally friendly. We could do a deal with Ngai Tahu. Instead of a gondola along the valley, we could run a regular service for tourists, up the valley, on reindeer sledges. . .What do you think, Santa?”

“Seems a pretty good idea. . .but not in between December 20th and 28th. That’s not negotiable.”

Blitzen is obviously pleased that his idea meets Santa’s approval, adding “Ngai Tahu reckons it’s the best valley in the south Island for viewing taniwha and the - supposed - extinct Moa. We could join in that marketing ploy, too.”

“Sure. I think I’ll have to discuss it with the Minister of Tourism - another reason to go up to Wellington soon - and, I’ll have to discuss it with Ngai Tahu. Now:” At this point Father Christmas glances at his agenda paper. “Another small item. This guy George W. Bush has sent a message all round the world, about a new proposal. It’s bound to have an effect on us here too. He’s responding to the global security situation. He wants to establish a big database, to catalogue all the information in the universe. Says it will make us all feel more secure.”

“How’s he going to do that?” someone strikes up, “and how’s it going to affect us?”

“Oh, they’re supposed to have vast arrays of the new quantum computers, new memory systems, new processing capability.”

“All the information in the universe, he says? That takes your breath away.” This is from one of the elves, Alan, in the special unit, expert in IT systems. “How are they going to get at all our data files?”

“They say they’ve got new powerful software to work it out from all our google searches.”

“I can’t believe it.”

“Yea, neither can I; but I must say I’m a bit worried” admits Father Christmas “What about our mailing lists, chimney clearance details, and so

on. I sincerely hope that's all completely secure."

"You never know", says Alan, with a cautious look on his face.

At this point one of the youngest of the elves, Bobby asks: "Hey Santa. If this guy is going to be able to download all our files, he'll be able to see all my mistakes in spelling and punctuation. Is that right, Santa?"

"Appears to be. Don't worry about it just for now. But you still need to improve spelling and punctuation, if you going to pass the Elf QA exam next year, don't you think?"

"I guess so, Santa" concedes the elf, a little shamefacedly.

"Last item". Father Christmas is keen to bring the meeting to a close. "What about the website, and marketing for this year's Christmas run?"

Alan, from the 'special unit' steps forward. "We've almost got the website in operation. . . and we've written a little song to advertise our new location. Rudy and three of the other reindeers are practicing it. We'll be putting it on YouTube in mid-November. Want to hear how it goes?"

"Sure!"

Four of the reindeers, Rudolph, Blitzen, Prancer and Vixen assemble in front of the meeting, one of them gives the key note, and then they all strike up the new song, to the tune of "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer".

Rudolph has gone down under  
Santa Claus has gone there too  
Relocatin' all their business  
Settin' up in Timaru

Gone there with all the reindeers  
Sixteen elves and helpers all  
Pleased now they're in New Zealand  
Soon they will be walkin' tall

So in time for Christmas eve  
Santa wants to know  
What you'd like on Christmas day  
But, remember, what to say:

“I wanna gift from Santa  
Here is where I'm writing from:  
Now send it off to: 'Dub Dub Dub,  
Santa Claus NZ, Dot Com'”

There is rapturous applause all round, and the  
hasty meeting draws to a close.

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A week later, Santa, accompanied by three reindeer, and Alan, elf from the special unit, are in Wellington. Two of the reindeer spend their time exploring the capital, while Father Christmas, Rudolph and Alan have their meetings with government ministers. They have just finished their negotiations at the Ministry of Sports and Recreation, have successfully launched the new Reindeer's Rugby Football Union, and then have had good discussions at the Ministry of Tourism. The three of them are looking around, taking a stroll down Lambton Quay. Coming in the opposite direction they see a curiously-impressive pair of figures. One of them, is about eight feet tall, with a formidable dark, wrinkled face, more like gorilla than man. The other,

still tall compared with Father Christmas, but reaching only up to the shoulders of the first of the pair, is stocky, muscular, vigorous in movement, wearing tea-shirt and shorts, his round spectacled face covered with a large black beard.

On seeing Father Christmas and his two friends, the smaller of the two puts his hand to his forehead, as if reminded of something, and, approaching them both, says: "Say, mate, you look a bit familiar. Haven't I seen you somewhere before. Jackson's the name, but me mates call me Pete. Were you one of the extras?"

"No, we've only been in New Zealand a couple of months. But you may have seen us on ads. I'm Father Christmas. Most people just call me 'Santa'".

"Awesome. Now *I KNOW* who you are! - Popular guy, aren't you! Put it there, Father Christmas!" They shake hands.

"This is me mate Kong. Most of us just call him King. He's a star in me latest movie."

King Kong shakes hand with Father Christmas, who is then seen feeling his hand very carefully, checking for broken bones.

King Kong greets the three with the words "G'day mate."

"This is my mate Rudolph"

"I've heard of you too, Rudolph. 'N how d'you like Godzone?"

"Pretty cool, eh?"

"And this is Alan - he's from our 'special unit' - specialist in all sorts of information technology. We've just been to a couple of government ministries - thought we'd best bring these two along, for any spin-offs from our negotiations - technology transfer, y'know."

“Say, Alan”, asks Pete, “know any modern trends in computer graphics?”

“Guess so. We need all that sort of stuff for the global outreach. Been into some cutting-edge stuff in the last couple of years, before we came here”.

“Well we want some smart experts for the next movies. Interested?”

“Sure am!”

“Let’s go for a little drink to discuss it, eh? You want to join us, King?”

“Sure. Say, do y’all want to join me and some of me mates for a ‘little smoko’? . . . a little ‘joint venture’ eh? Know what I mean? [wink wink, nudge nudge] Got a cool little dive across in Miramar.”

“Not *NOW*, eh, King. Business comes first, eh?”

A little while later they are sitting round a table, drinking beer in “The Dog and Bone”.

Peter Jackson asks “Say, you guys? Got any suggestions for the next movie? - Something with lot’s of opportunity for modern computer graphics, morphing one thing into another, space-age special effects, y’know?”

Alan suggests “How about ‘The Father Christmas Story’. I’ve heard some of the story from this guy here” - he nods in Father Christmas’ direction.

Father Christmas screws up his face, and firmly shakes his head. “No way, mate! Won’t allow it. We never let family secrets to be made public. It’s a long established tradition, going back hundreds of years - thousands, even.”

“How about ‘The Origin of Species?’”, Alan tries again.

Peter Jackson scratches his head. "Charles Darwin, eh? . . . Nice idea, Alan. Lots of opportunity for morphing one creature into another . . . could be quite cool . . . but pretty controversial I'd guess. In the past we just haven't done controversy - could cause riots in some places, you know."

Alan looks thoughtful, and then, with a coy look on his face says: "Ever heard of a book called 'Gulliver's travels?'. We read it in one of the unit's at Elf-school."

"I've read that book too. . . . Now there's a good idea. All those images of tiny little people tying down Gulliver, the big giant; and then, in the next journey, Gulliver the tiny little person, treated like a pet hamster by the giants in the new place he's fetched up in. I like it."

"It's a bit risky in places isn't it? . . . bit too near the bone, eh" offers Alan cautiously.

"Oh we could skip those bits, or . . . we *could* try to be just a *little bit* controversial - *gentle* satire eh? Only for those who can get subtle points, eh? . . . but plenty more for everyone else. Let me think about it. I'll read it again. . . give it some thought. Can you give me your e-mail address? I'll get back to you."

At this point an elderly figure, with a chin like a chisel, and half an inch of stubble, emerges from the background, a little the worse for beer, and greets King Kong. "G'day mate. . . . G'day yous guys! Keeping out of trouble still, Kong?"

"G'day Sparky! Not seen you f'r ages Sure am keeping out of trouble! Got a good job with this guy here." He indicates Pete. "Wad'y think of that!"



“I’d never have believed it, Kong. You always were a pretty hard case, eh? Bit of a stirrer, eh?”

“No more now, mate. Earning big bucks.”

“Say, the country’s really going to the dogs, isn’t it?”

“Wad’ye mean Sparky?”

“Bloody gov’ment eh?”

“What’s biting you now, Sparky?”

“Bloody fart tax! What’s the country coming to? Free country, they say? Forget it now, mate! Then there’s the anti-smacking bill. ‘an then there’s this Frenetic Engineering . . .you havn’t heard of it Kong? Next thing - did’y hear - they’re allowing Battery-Driven Hens! Next thing, mark my words . . .sure as eggs are eggs, they’ll be bringing in chicken brothels. Mark my words!”

“Scary! It’s a bit of a worry, eh, Sparky.”

“Anyway, Kong, I’ve got to be off home now. Nice to see y’again. Keep out of trouble. Don’t do anything I wouldn’t do eh?” Sparky gives Kong a big wink.

“Sure will. I mean, sure won’t. Cheery, mate!”

After this interlude, they drink their beer for a while. Then Pete asks: “Say, Santa: Pretty big change for you guys coming out here, wasn’t it. Didn’t you and your mates hang out in Lapland or somewhere?”

“Oh that was a long time ago. We’ve had our head office at the North Pole - for a long time now - but y’know, one thing and another, global warming, security situation in the Northern hemisphere . . . It all added up, and in the end we decided we had to relocate. . . .and then, after we’d taken the decision, the floor of my office melted away, and all our stuff went

straight down into the drink . . .straight down into the arctic ocean, would you believe it! That settled it.”

“Sure. I guess it would. . .But how’re you settling down here? Getting the business side of things running OK?”

“Well, there’s a lot to do. We’ll be on time for this year’s Christmas run, just about, I think . . .but by next year, we’ll be much better organized. We’re gradually getting folks used to ordering their gifts over the internet.”

“Sort of Santa-on-line?”

“That’s the idea.”

“Your transport costs must be a big part of the whole operation, eh?”

“Not really, in the past. Rudolph and his team can undercut any regular courier service, y’know. Still, we’re expanding, and the demand may outstrip our ability to deliver in a year or two. Bit of a worry.”

“Ever thought of out-sourcing some of that part of the business?”

“No - but who’d do it?”

“Ever thought of Canada. Moose! - they’re big business. Growing trend! Big bucks in a few years, if you know what you’re doing. Perhaps not so fast as reindeer- but they can draw much bigger payloads, I’d guess. And they deliver anywhere - Alaska to Siberia, I’ve heard.”

“Thanks, Pete. Customers may take a bit of time to get used to it - not quite the traditional image, y’know. . . But I’ll give it some thought.”

“Well, Kong, what’s next?”

“Got to get back to me mates in Miramar.”

“I’d best set off back to the main studio. How about you Santa?”

“Oh, we’re flying back to Timaru soon. Rudolph has a couple of his mates, ready to take us back. When were we to meet up, Rudy?”

“Oh, ‘bout 4.30. We’d better be getting to meet up with ‘em. Courtney Place, wasn’t it? Much easier for a takeoff than the airport.”

“OK. See you, Pete. See you, King.”

“Be seeing you, Santa, Rudolph; and, Alan, if you’ve any more ideas, just let me know. Travel safely!”

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It is early November, back in the rooms in Timaru. Father Christmas is chairing the next business meeting:

“OK folks. Any apologies?”

“Yes”. This is Rudolph. “One from Comet. Can’t make it. Urgent business up at Mount Cook. I’ll tell you more in a moment.”

“OK folks. I’ve got a number of developments to report. First thing: About that crazy plan to make a database of all the information in the universe. They’ve run into some technical snags, I hear on the grapevine. Besides I think that guy Bush is a bit pre-occupied at present. Something about a presidential election.”

“That’d be right” observed Dancer.

“Next. When we were coming back from Wellington last week, we were up at about a thousand meters when we were observed by a top-dressing plane. They’ve reported us to ‘Child Youth and Family’ - for smacking reindeer.”

There are loud guffaws from three of the reindeer who were in the team on that day, while Rudolph, also in the team, smirks broadly, but more discretely.

“I wrote back to CYF to say that we don’t ‘smack’ the reindeer, we just give them little signals, to keep them on course, when we’re at high speed. Can’t actually say anything to the team - they’d never hear when we’re really moving. Wasn’t any good. CYF wrote back to say that we were definitely smacking the reindeer. So, I’ve sent a request to AUT, asking if they can get someone to design a proper ‘smackometer’. I also asked CYF to get a rigorous definition from the ministry of exactly what constitutes a ‘smack’. Heard back this morning - if it’s less than 0.007 Newtons, it doesn’t count as a smack. So there we are. When in Rome, do as the Romans, eh? Should get the prototype of the ‘smackometer’ delivered by early December”

“Oh, yes, then there’s another letter. This time it’s from the chairman of the Waikouaiti Race meeting. They’ve noticed that we do pretty good speeds, when we get airborne. They want to set up a race meeting for reindeer, and similar aircraft. Should we go with it?”

“So long as it doesn’t interfere with the Christmas run, Santa.” Rudolph sounds cautious.

“Sure thing Rudy. We can’t make compromises on core business. But after Christmas, shall we go for it?”

“Depends a bit on this ‘smackometer’ thing, eh?”

“OK. But if we get that that sorted out?”  
All the reindeer agree.

“Right-oh. Agreed. Next item: Business ventures: Jim, how’s things going with ‘Bubble-wrap Solutions’?”

“Coming along nicely, Santa. Production in full swing now, and we’re just starting to see

some sales. Should be making money by mid-December.”

“Great. Anything more to report?”

“Well, I’m investigating another idea. There’s a big cement works a few miles out of town. I’m working with them to develop a really neat joint venture - we distribute loads of our new bubble wrap on their trucks, along with each load of cement bags. It reduces their payload, and cuts down their fuel bills, so they’re happy to do it for nothing.”

“What a brilliant idea, Jim. Keep it up. . . right - Blitzen - what’s going on with the Mount Cook venture?”

“Coming along very nicely. We’re starting a regular service up to the higher snow fields throughout the National Park; and we’re going to do longer trips, by request, when we’re free . . . and weather permitting, of course. In season, it’ll provide full-time employment for four of the team.”

“What about Comet? What’s keeping him up at Mount Cook, Rudy?”

“Oh, there’s a mountain rescue needed. Couple of guys snowed in, on a steep slope, high up on Mount Tasman. Comet’s the fittest, and most agile of us all, so we gave him the job. He’s up there now.”

“How exciting. Wish him luck.”

“He’ll be all right, Santa.”

“What about the team as a whole. Are they getting into good shape for Christmas?”

“Still a little way to go. Still got to improve fitness.”

“Fine, but remember, working from down here, the Christmas run will involve much longer distances for some of you.”

“We’ll get there. I’ve never seen the team so eager. They’re all keen as mustard. We hit 200 k last week. Must be something in the air - or perhaps it’s the effect of Rugby.”

At this point Alan, the IT expert from the ‘special unit’ interrupts. “Hey Santa. Just got a text message. You ought to know about it. News from the United States of America and England. The White House has been taken over by a band of men in white coats, said to be terrorists . . . disguised as psychiatrists. . . Oh yes . . . a bit more coming in. . . The latest newsflash says that the President has been taken to a large estate, in an unknown part of the universe. A terrorist group has claimed responsibility, and says the President is now in safe custody in what they describe as a ‘virtual universe’. They showed a neat picture of him in his new environment . . . cool little work room, lot’s of computer interfaces. It showed that he could ‘zap’ anywhere he wanted, anywhere in the universe, they say, just by pressing the right button. He looked quite calm and relaxed; seemed to be quite used to such an environment.”

“OK. Bit of a relief. That seems to be all under good control . . . but keep me in the loop.”

At this moment, the door bursts open and in comes Comet, straight from his adventure in the Alps, self-effacing, but still flushed with success.

“Sorry I’m late Santa. Little trouble up at Mount Cook; but it’s all sorted out now.”

“Tell us all about it” asks Father Christmas. But before anyone has time to answer or listen, the door breaks open again, and in comes a reporter, followed by a camera-man from the ‘Timaru Herald’.

“Comet you’re a hero” says the reporter. So the reporter, photographer, and then all the elves and reindeer crowd round the hero Comet, to hear the story. Camera lights flash on and off; hubbub prevails, and in the ensuing chaos Father Christmas shrugs his shoulders, and brings the meeting to a close.

%%%%%%%%%

A week later, at Taumurunui again, we are high on the plateau of the North island. There is bright sunshine, and a fresh breeze. Not far from the main trunk line, we see the driveway leading into a newly-formed enterprise, prominently labeled, above its entrance, “Taumurunui Wind International”. Large trucks are seen entering from the main road, loaded with equipment and manufacturing materials; and others are seen leaving, some packed with long, long concrete poles, others with large, large triple-vented wind sails, all for the emerging domestic and export markets, to wind farms spread across the globe. A medium-sized truck pulls in, loaded with sacks of concrete on its front section, and with many layers of helium-filled bubble wrap at the rear.

The driver gets out on one side, and Jim, from ‘Father Christmas Enterprises’, climbs down from the passenger seat. The driver, employee of the cement firm near Timaru, surveys his load, and then starts to unload the sacks of concrete. He is soon joined by two other strong men from the company at Taumurunui.

Five minutes later, something extraordinary happens: The rear wheels of the truck lift off the ground; and it looks as if the whole truck is

about to go skywards, when Jim, realizing what is happening exclaims:

“Wait! wait! Breach of protocol! You should *always* unload the bubble wrap *before* the concrete.”

It looks as though his words are too late. However, the driver, quick as a flash, takes out a large knife from his tool kit, and slashes through the cords binding the bubble wrap to the back of the truck. Hundreds of sheets of bubble-wrap float gently upwards, and the rear of the truck gradually falls back until it is resting again on all four wheels. Jim is aghast at the loss of the load of precious bubble wrap, while the driver and the other two, quite unfazed, continue unloading the truck. When the job is done, they all settle down for a smoko.

Suddenly, the bright sunshine is dimmed, as if by a large cloud overhead, although there is not a cloud in the sky. The driver has a sudden shiver, as the air seems to turn cooler. Jim, alert and keen as mustard jumps up, and peers fixedly into the sky, while the others continue drinking their tea, and smoking their cigarettes. Having sized up the situation, Jim puts his hand on his forehead, shuts his eyes, in deepest concentration. Then, in a moment of totally distracted inspiration, he flings his arms out wide, and cries out ecstatically “Eureka! I’ve got it!”

“What’s got into yer mate?” one of the company men asks of the driver laconically.

“Search me, mate. He’s a bit strange that way sometimes. He’s quite harmless. What’s amiss, eh, Jim?”

“That cloud which passed over just now! . . .notice how we all felt a bit cooler! . . .that



was our load of bubble wrap, spread over a patch of sky.”

“So? What’s the big deal?”

“Ever heard of global warming . . . climate change . . . folk all round the world are looking for ways to combat it.”

“So, what’s that got to do with yer perishing bubble wrap?”

“Don’t you see? . . . If we really go global with the bubble-wrap industry, we can solve it. . . at a stroke . . . Just imagine it . . . a really big industry based in Timaru . . . importing massive quantities of helium . . . and then releasing large quantities of helium-filled bubble wrap into the sky . . . finance? . . . we could build it into the carbon trading scheme . . . ‘helium offsets’, eh?”

“Don’t worry about him, mate . . . he’ll cool down soon.”

“Listen you! You guys . . . you’ve no imagination! . . . no vision! . . . What was in the minds of your ancestors when they decide to come here? . . . Ever thought of that? . . . Abel Tasman? . . . Captain Cook? . . . to say nothing of the Tatangata Whenua . . . Think Big, say I? . . . but I’ve got to get back to Wellington now. . . Sort out the implications of this new idea . . . get a ‘proof-of-concept’ scheme going . . . When are we driving back?”

“Sorry matey. I’ve got another part of this load to deliver up to Auckland. Not a chance.”

“Then how can I get back to the capital? I’ve got urgent business to conduct with my partners there.”

“You could try the ‘Overlander’. It’ll be through here in half an hour’s time. Station’s

just ten minute's walk away." The speaker seems quite unconcerned by Jim's anxious, urgent tone. Jim disappears at a run. The driver shrugs his shoulders, and, placidly, the other three continue their smoko, as the sound of a locomotive is heard in the distance.

%%%%%%%%%

It is the first week in December. Back in Timaru: another business meeting is about to begin.

"OK" begins Father Christmas, his stance and movements betraying solid confidence.

"Fitness, Rudy?"

"Never been better. We hit 300k last week. Sometimes we approach Mach-one."

"Great stuff. Now: orders?"

"They're rolling in. Just as big as last year . . .they'll be complete in a fortnight, all ready for the big day."

"Good. A couple of items of news. The headgear for RRFU is now in mass production. We'll feature as a major attraction in next year's season. The other item: We've just fixed our first date for Reindeer Races: Special feature coming after the Forbury Trots down in Dunedin. Oh yes . . .one other item of news: The prototype smackometer has arrived. We'll be giving it trial runs at the next training session. Right-oh! Next matters: Business: How's the Mount cook venture going, Blitzen?"

"Business is growing. The website is attracting good custom. May need to recruit new reindeer soon."

"Reindeer? There aren't many to spare down here?"

“Yeah, but there’s lot’s of smaller dear in the paddocks. We could train them up in teams, for the lower runs.”

“OK. Let’s see how it goes. Keep me in the loop. Now then . . .Alan: . . .Got any deal’s signed with Peter Jackson’s outfit?”

“Sure. We’re developing a new venture based on ‘Gulliver’s Travels’. But we’re looking for another expert . . .someone who can do satire.”

“How about Jack Sprat from the special unit . . .what do you think about it Jack?”

“Pretty cool. I’ll do it. Coming all this way here . . .guess I’ve got the genuine experience.”

“O.K. That seems to be going fine. Next item: Rudy, and your team: Got a message two days ago from the O.E.C.D. in Paris. Apparently your carbon hoofprints are well below the O.E.C.D. average. Congratulations!”

“Thanks Santa. I always knew we were the most efficient transport system ever known.”

At this point Prancer burps loudly, and, covered in shame, blurts out “Sorry Santa. I know it doesn’t help the global corporate profile. Just think of the greenhouse gases.”

Santa ignores this interruption. “Now then, just to finish off: I’ve got three serious matters. Don’t worry too much. . . we can cope, but we need to take note. First one: When we were up in Wellington a few weeks ago, I asked the Minister if the “Bill of Rights” could be extended to reindeer. Just heard this week - they’ve passed an amendment to the Bill. It’s all OK now.”

At this point Cupid, with a quizzical look on his snout asks: “OK, fine for *reindeer*; but does the ‘Bill of Rights’ apply to all dear? Y’know, I’ve seen lots of smaller deer in paddocks behind

high fences - what about them - doesn't seem what I'd expect from the Bill of Rights; and if we're to get them involved in the Mount Cook business, we've got to consider them."

"You got a point there, Cupid. It'll have to wait 'til the New Year; another trip to Wellington, I guess; have to be in February now. OK next item: I got a message from Child Youth and Family. There's a new rule for all Santas - a chaperone is needed whenever they're dealing with small children; and I guess it'll apply to reindeer too under the new amendment. Any comments?"

"'When in Rome' as they say", adds one of the reindeer laconically.

"OK", last item, "Got a small news flash yesterday morning . . .report of new paper just come out in the journal 'Nature' . . . someone in USA and E has just published the complete genome for a pure inbred strain of mince pie. Then I hear from another guy that they're taking a patent out on the genome - lab in Florida is setting up a new spinout company to breed them, by the million. Soon the world will be flooded by a vast number of counterfeit GM mince pies!".

"Don't we have a patent on mince pies?"

"Sure we do... one of the first we filed, way back in the eighteenth century . . .but we don't have one on its *genome*. That's 'intellectual property' . . .Get it? Any solutions?"

"We *could* try spreading a virus to infect the bogus pies?"

"OK. Alf? Will you look into it?"

"Sure"

"We'll hear from you early in the New Year?"

"Do my best"

%%%%%%%%%

It is mid-December, the last business meeting before the big day - the meeting when all the final preparations are made, and final plans announced. Rudolph is noticeably absent at the start.

“Where’s Rudy?” begins Father Christmas, sharply.

“He’ll be here in a moment” someone calls out.

“OK. Look I’ve been drafting the final plans for Christmas run. You know the style . . . who takes which bit. I’ll give you all the details in a moment. . . but before I do that, remember there’s lot’s of new features for this year’s run. Much longer distance to be covered between the main centres . . .but there are some other new problems which may arise. We’ll have a debriefing early in January . . . you can table your reports then on any problems . . .impossible chimneys. . . frontier problems. . .and we might just get some problems from that George Bush guy, or some of his hangers-on . . .and I want detailed reports of any counterfeit Father Christmas’s.”

They all nod their heads, keenly attentive.

“Right, now let me give out the details of the run. Rudy - when he comes - he’ll do the North American section. He knows that bit better than anyone else. Comet . . .will you do South America?”

“Sure will Santa! Leave it to me!”

“Now, Blitzen . . .Western Europe”

“Fine”

“Vixen: eastern and northern Europe?”

“Know it well. Will do!”

“Cupid: Southern Europe?”

“Can do”

“Dancer: Russia and Siberia”

“Oh, not again Santa, I always get that bit”

“Oh come on Dancer!”

“Well, if you insist!”

“Dasher: India and region?”

“Sure”

“Prancer: East Asia and Japan?”

“Sure”

“Lucky last: Donner: How about Australasia .  
. . .you’ve got the easiest section.”

“Sure thing Santa”

“Now Bert. Can you bring us up-to-date on  
finance?”

“It’s not looking good, at present, Santa.  
The revenue is slow to come in. We’ve had lots of  
orders, and so we’ve bought the stock; but in the  
next few weeks we’ll be in the red.”

“OK. Just a short-term worry. We’ll do better  
next year. Not unexpected actually. . . .  
But whatever has happened to Rudolph. Never known  
him ever to miss the final planning meeting of  
the year, any time in the last twenty years.”

At this point a shuffling is heard in the  
stairway outside, and in comes Rudolph,  
disheveled, and on crutches. “Santa!! I broke me  
leg this afternoon in a Rugby scrum!!”

“What!! Rudy! That’s a bloody disaster!  
You’re the mainstay of our delivery network!”

The meeting dissolves into turmoil.

After a bit, the disorder subsides a little, but  
Arthur, the elves shop steward struts forward: “I  
knew summat like this were goin tuh ‘appen.

‘Appen it would . . . ‘appen it wouldn’t. Now we  
know . . . it’s ‘appened. Tuh put it straight . .  
.and it’s no secret . . . ah’m reight fed up here

y'know. An' ah dor'nt think much o't commercial spin you're all givin' tuh for 'Father Christmas Enterprises' either, sithee Santa. Let me put it tuh thee quite straight . . . quite blunt: I'll mek a proposal: Let's all guh back up o'er. Ah know a reight cosy little spot near Ilkely. Who's in favour?"

This enigmatic question hangs in the air, when another elf, Ernie, strikes up: "I don't much like it here either, you know. Things are all upside down here: Who ever heard of Christmas in mid-summer, Easter in Autumn, Guy Fawks night in spring, I just don't get it! and I just don't get who are the upper class. . . y'know the people we look down on."

Another elf, Ron, breaks in "I know what you mean. Back home they had things called 'love songs'. Here they seem to have a special brand - 'art form' they call it . . . call it 'hate songs'. Know what I mean, Santa?"

Father Christmas breaks in incisively: "We've godder adapt to the local culture, Ron." He has a sharp, urgent, almost desperate tone to his voice " . . and we've godder do it fast . . . or we'll just go under."

He makes a 'thumbs-down' gesture. "End of Father Christmas Enterprises. . . after all these years . . . I can't bear the thought of it."

Another elf, Andy calls out scornfully: "Don't bother about him . . .I've heard of what you call 'hate songs'. Actually, I've written one of me own"

"Let's hear it Andy!" says Ernie, jeeringly. Andy settles himself in front of the audience, and Ernie positions himself in front of an upturned oil barrel, to provide a rhythm.

'Father Christmas, on the run;  
Christmas prezzies, yeah! - lots of fun!;  
Present mirth has present laught-  
er. What's ter come is still in draft.  
Uh! Don't believe a bloody word.  
Life is getting quite absurd!'

'Holly, mistletoe and ivy,  
It's the rich wot scoops the grivy  
Grivy training, wot a gime  
It's the poor wot get's the blime.  
Blimed, if I believe a bloody word  
Life is getting quite absurd.'

'Come, live with me, and be my wife  
"Aw, shucks? Another slice of life?"  
Every wise man's son does know:  
What's to come: Another blow!  
"Optimism": must just be cured.  
"Life":- sentence, to be endured.'

'It's the same the whole world over  
Most in trouble: Few in clover.  
Cloven feat. I've won a prize!  
Craven Eh? It's no surprise  
Just a little bit bizarre.  
Isn't it a goal "too far"?''

'Naught's had: all's spent,  
And we've got nowt to pay the rent.  
Nothing venture, nothing win!  
Roulette wheel? Another spin?  
'Tis better to be that which we destroy,  
Than be, once more: Destiny's toy.'

'You've heard me argue; Just in jest.  
You've hear me speak; Y'know the rest.'



The rest is silence; That you know.  
Hamlet said it long ago.  
To be or not to be? That's the quest-  
-ion. But y'know, I speak in jest!'

He finishes with a sardonic leer in Father Christmas's direction. There is uproar in the meeting room. Santa looks aghast at the rebellion in the ranks. It seems as though Arthur is going to call for a vote on his proposal to go back up over, to settle on the slopes of Ilkely Moor. Then one of the quieter elves, Sam by name, steps forward, and addresses the meeting, diffident at first, but with growing confidence.

'Yuh sounding just a wee bit peeved.  
Why yuh sounding so aggrieved?  
Were we wrong to come down under?  
Wasn't wrong? Not a blunder?  
Father Christmas: You're OK!  
We'll live to rap another day.'

'We gotta work; we gotta plan  
Let's make this place the best we can.  
Can the comment! Come and take  
Our best opportunity, and make  
The best we can of every job:  
We all can earn an honest bob'

Bob's your uncle; we can do it  
When in doubt, just say: "Go for it!"  
You say: "we'll fail!" But screw  
Your courage to the sticking point  
And we'll not fail; that we all knew,  
When we took stock, we were not faint!

Faint heart never won fair lady

Lady bird, fly back up north  
Just hold our course, and keep it steady  
We all took stock; said "Let's go forth!"  
Ther'ain't no goin' back up over!  
Let's make this place a field of clover!

The early folk here had it tough;  
Made it possible for us  
So let's not hear that whinging stuff:  
Load of nonsense, lot of fuss  
Emigration ain't a lark.  
Now we're here: Must make our mark!

Coming here: a big decision;  
But, here we find a good tradition  
Confidence: It ain't no sin  
Nothing venture, nothing win.  
Father Christmas, never fear  
We don't do cynicism here!'

There is a sudden quiet - a critical moment, as  
all realize, for a big decision. In the pause,  
Comet, the fittest of all the reindeers, says  
quietly, but distinctly, "Santa, I'll do  
Rudolph's run."

"So? . . . and who'll do South America?"

"I will"

"Both of them together? that's a *mighty* big  
job for one reindeer. Can you tackle both  
together?"

"Sure, I can. I've worked it out Santa. .  
.over to Antarctica . . head south from here . .  
. great circle route . . .King Edward land . .  
.Elsworth land . . .South Orkney . . . Tierra del  
Fuego . . . and there we are! It'll be a doddle!  
I can get to the tip of South America double  
quick . . . see if I don't!"

“Cripes! It’s never been done before by a reindeer with a loaded sledge!”

“I can do it! . . .and then just continue north ‘til I get up to Alaska. Some of the prezzies may be a little bit late, Santa; but then in Alaska, Christmas eve is later than anywhere else. I can do it!”

“Comet, you’re a marvel. I’ll take you on any day. But it’s mighty cold down there. Do you want some . . . *thermal underwear?*”

“Forget it Santa . . . when I’m really moving, I stay pretty warm.”

“OK. How about the rest of you? Any questions?”

“All the rest’ll pan out, just as you planned it! Just see!” assures Blitzen calmly, with a cheeky smile.”

“OK, then: After a little local trouble . . . .ahem . . . [Santa peers casually over his spectacles at Arthur] . . . I think we’re all set for the big one. Good luck everybody!”

“Thanks Santa. We’ll do it!”

%%%

It is late January. All went well on the Christmas run, just exactly according to plan. Comet pulled off his master plan with immaculate success. Finances picked up by early January, though some of the revenue was a little late coming. After the pre-Christmas exertions and anxieties Father Christmas is now having a well-earned break. He is sitting chatting with an aged and very distinguished Maori elder, Tamihere Morgan, in a little secluded crib, high in the foothills of the Southern Alps. A small bottle of

best malt whisky has just been opened, and a roaring manuka-log fire keeps them both warm.

“So, tell me, Tami, I’ve seen your place down in the McKenzie country. . .Where we met up a couple of weeks ago . . . But when did your people first come there?”

“Oh . . .that was over a hundred years ago. Before that our folk lived in Banks Peninsula - little place called Okains Bay, as they call it. . . nice secluded valley by the sea, north coast of the peninsula. We lived there for a long, long time. Three or four hundred years, perhaps. They’ve got a museum there now, if you want to go and see it. Got one of our canoes still there.”

“Next time I’m in Bank’s peninsula I’ll sure pay a visit to that museum . . .But, tell me, Tami. . . .Why did you shift inland? Your people had lived by the sea for as long as anyone could remember”

“Ah . . .those folk at Okains Bay . . . they didn’t just stick around there . . .They wanted to know the whole country . . .Who wouldn’t? . . .and some of those folk were real explorers . . .they knew how to get across the alps . . .some of the routes were well known to our folk . . .the Copeland pass, as they call it . . we knew all about that route. . .but it’s much easier to approach it from the other side, and that’s probably how it was first discovered . . .but in some of the valleys over there. . and in some near here too . . coming down into the McKenzie basin . . .they found pounamu . . .know what I mean . . .greenstone, they call it . . .very valuable for carving ornaments, and for making *mere*. . .I’ve got one of them in the other room. Like to see it?”

“Sure would!”

Tamihere Morgan disappeared for a moment, and came back with a large wooden box. He opens the lid, and there, laid neatly in a precise mould lined with green velvet is a beautiful greenstone adze, the greenstone head firmly bound to the elegantly carved wooden handle.

Father Christmas is spellbound, speechless.

“Tamihere! That’s just beautiful, magnificent.”

“Our folk had several more of them in days gone by . . .but we gave some of them to that museum at Okains Bay . . . others to the museum in Christchurch. But I kept one for myself, eh? . . .Another Scotch, Santa?”

“Sure, thanks. . . .So how do come to be living in the McKenzie country?”

“We-e-e-ll. About a hundred years ago, my grandmother married a Welshman named Morgan. . . .I remember him well. . . .what a character . . .tough as old boots, hard-working, hard-drinking too, when he got into town . . .he shouldn’t’a been . . .they were all Methodists . . . staunch teetotallers . . . where he came from in the Welsh valleys. . . .but I guess he sort’a ran wild when he got down under . . .and he ran sheep in the Godley valley, not far from here. My dad was born out there, and he inherited the station . . .that’s where I grew up . . .during the war, y’know. . . .”

“So, what’ve you been doing since then?”

“Spent some time as a young man in Oz. . . .Sydney actually. Then, when my dad died, thirty five years ago now, I ran the station for a while. . . .but then we sold up in the 1980s . . .made quite good money. . . .and I become a tourist guide for DOC, at Tekapo. . . .and then I retired

five years ago. I'm still strong and fit . . .  
.lot's of life in the old dog, yet, eh?"

"Do you know anything about your own folk before that? Before Okains Bay? When the first of your people came to Aotearoa, they made landfall way up north, didn't they?"

"Sure they did. But our iwi came south long, long ago. Some quarrel over land up North, so the story goes . . .and when those folk got into a quarrel, they really meant business, eh? . . . so our lot, they took to their wakas, came south to Okains Bay."

"And before that?"

"Eh! . . .Long, long ago. . . .We all came from Hawaiki . . .That's what we all call the place . . .somewhere way, way up north, far up over the ocean, I guess it was."

"They must have come here in small boats."

"Waka . . . canoes, you call them . . .our folks reckon we landed at a place called Doubtless Bay, just a few miles across the land from what's called ninety-mile beach . . .far up at the top of the North Island."

"What a journey that must have been! . . . thousands of miles of open ocean - weather, storms, ocean currents - and it really happened . . .because you're here! . . .Can you imagine it . . .a thousand years ago . . . when those folk first stepped out of their canoes, on that unknown beach, in an unknown land, with never a chance of returning? . . .and anyway, how did they know there was land down here?"

"We-e-e-ll - no-one really knows. But those early folk - *really* the very first settlers - they must have been very experienced sailors, navigators, eh? They'd been exploring the pacific islands for hundreds, even thousands of years.

They were used to long ocean voyages in open canoes. They'd know the signs to look out for - birds flying south, in the summer, north in the winter - those birds must be coming from somewhere, going somewhere, eh? . . . Must have *known* where they were going . . . and those early voyagers . . . they knew where they were going too. . . they'd know how to steer a steady direction . . . follow the stars . . . our folk knew all about that."

"Did they *paddle* all that way"

"Nah, that's just imagination, load of tommyrot, Santa. They knew quite well how to make sails . . . use the wind."

"But they must have been strong, strong fellas?"

"Sure, they wouldn't'a chosen weaklings for a voyage like that. That's why we're all such big strong men and women here now."

"What about food, fresh water?"

"Food that's easy - our people always grew strong on seafood - runs in the blood, so to speak, for as long as anyone can tell. Fresh water - who knows? There'd be rain water to collect, and y'can get a good drink from the juices out of some fish. But they'd prepare for those voyages . . . have plenty of reserve supplies of water on board."

"And before that?" Father Christmas has a hopeful smile on his face.

"Before that, there was Rangi, the Sky Father, and Papa, the Earth Mother . . . that's when it all started. . . the very beginning. . . But tell me Santa?" Here Tami leans over to poke the fire, and the sparks fly in the dimly lit room. "Tell me your story, tell me your whakapapa?"

“Well! . . .We don’t usually say much about it in public, Tami . . .but this isn’t in public . . .so I’ll tell you. Actually, we’ve been working with reindeer for a very long time, several generations, actually.”

“Several generations? But your folk live a long, long time. Hundreds of years I’d guess. Worked with reindeer for generations, you say? That’d be thousands of years, wouldn’t it?”

“Sure . . .Actually, it wasn’t me that figured out how to get a reindeer team airborne. That was my old man. We call him Grandfather Christmas. He came from the far, far north . . . somewhere up at the top end of Norway, ‘bout two thousand years ago, or more. Got the technique mastered about that time. . . and when he’d perfected the system, and figured out how to get the reindeer fit enough, he used to go all round the world. He was probably the first person from the north ever to see Aotearoa - what we call New Zealand - even saw Antarctica. I know it because he told me, when I was a kid in Turkey - but that’s all forgotten except for a few traditional beliefs in the part of the world where I grew up. It was in Turkey where he settled, in his old age. I went on a few of the last of his runs, when I was young. Gave me this great idea! . . .Distribute gifts all round the world, using reindeer express post. Cool idea, eh? . . .So, when I got a bit older, I worked on the idea, and gradually, over the years, it’s become a great tradition. As you know, it’s been going for many centuries now. We even did a few Christmas runs down under in the early days, to this part of the world . . .but there didn’t seem to be any signs of human habitation at that time.”



“There might have been, y’know, Santa. But a thousand years ago, there wouldn’t’a been many of our folk around, and you might’a missed us. But . . . y’know there’s a story that’s been passed down to us . . . heard it from several old folk . . . of a strange bird . . . like a big Moa with four legs, and big horny head . . . racing through the sky, around mid-summer, pulling what looked like a little waka, through the sky. Perhaps it was you . . . on one of those early Christmas runs.”

“Could’a been. . . After that, the business grew . . . slowly at first . . . but, as the number of people around the world increased, it started to grow bigger and bigger. So then we had to hire more and more reindeer . . . then we needed other folk to get in on the act - the elves - to help with the admin, y’know. . . and recently we’ve been doing regular Christmas runs down here. . . We never based it on money until recently . . . but, we can’t be sure of efficient delivery unless we raise at least a bit of brass. So now, we’ve got our finance department . . . but it’s never been the main thing. . . and then, I’ve told you why we had to move down here . . . That day when the office sank through the artic ice at the North Pole. I’ll never forget that day.” Father Christmas chuckled over his scotch.

“Do you know anything about your *Grandfather*, Santa?”

“No . . . I never knew him . . . he’d be called Great Grandfather Christmas, I suppose . . . but I heard from my old man that it was him who first tamed the reindeer for travel on land . . . that’d be thousands of years ago . . . but I don’t know very much.”

The fire has been burning low, and the bottle of scotch is empty.

“Time to hit the sack, eh, Santa.”

“Guess so.”

“But before that let me get you something to remember this evening.”

Tami disappears again into the darkness of the other room, and comes back a little later. He presents Father Christmas with a small, beautifully carved greenstone tikki.

“Is that for me Tami?”

“It is.”

“How can I ever thank you?”

“No need to thank me, Santa . . .You’ve given us all so much.”

“Those gifts . . .that’s nothing. . .that’s just a job.”

“But you give us some thing much bigger than that, Santa. . . good will . . . trust . . .even hope, eh?”

Father Christmas, for a moment, is overcome with emotion, and puts his hand over his eyes to hide his tears.

“I don’t know what to say, Tami.”

“Let’s turn in for the night eh, Santa?”

Then the two depart for their sleeping quarters.

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Two weeks later, the holiday period is over, and Father Christmas is back at work. In the rooms in Timaru, Father Christmas, with the reindeer, and the elves are having a meeting for debriefing after the Christmas run.

“So how did it all go, fellas? How d’ya get on with the longer distances? Any problems?”

All the reindeer can be seen shaking their heads. “Not a problem” says Dancer.

“Weather? . . .Any storms? . . .tornados?”

“High winds over the Korean Peninsula” says Prancer, “but we coped all right. No probs Santa”. There is a nonchallant, even a swaggering tone to his voice.

“Any other problems?”

“The elf working with me got stuck in one of the chimneys of Buckingham palace”, says Blitzen with a smirk on his face. “They’ve changed the clearance since we were there last year . . . But we got him out in the end . . . and there was a write up two days later, in the Daily Express . . . claimed the Royals had had burglars. . . It’s only us know what really happened.”

“Anything else? Bogus Father Christmas’s?”

“Couple in Japan . . . but no-one’d ever mistake them for the real thing”. This is Prancer again.

“Any thing else?” Not a word of complaint from the whole assembly, who look mighty pleased with themselves.

“Alf . . . Anything to report about mince pie genomes?”

“It’s all right Santa - y’can’t take a patent out on a genome unless you can say what it’s to be used for - and we’ve got that patent, fair and square. No question of that.”

“OK. There’s just one small matter we have to resolve. Jim has got the bubble-wrap industry going nicely now - and he wants to expand, big-time - go global. So, for marketing purposes, we’ve got to have a really good catchy brand name - one that’ll sell world-wide. Any suggestions” There is a pause while the meeting considers the possibilities.

“How about ‘Bubble-wrap global enterprise’” suggests someone.

“Ye-e-ah, but a bit staid, don’t y’reckon?”

“Third Millenium Bubble-wrap” suggests another.

Ye-e-ah - but we could do better. We want something with a distinctive ‘down-under’ feel about it, don’t we.”

“How about ‘Godzone Bubble-Wrap’”

There are boos from the assembly.

“Nah - just a little bit twee.”

“How about something based on the old name - ‘Bubble-Wrap Solutions’” suggests Jack Sprat, the joke writer. “. . .How about . . . ‘*South-Sea Bubble-Wrap Solutions*’”.

“Hm-m-m. ‘South-Sea Bubble-Wrap Solutions’ . . .That’s interesting . . . got potential.” There are noises of interest from the meeting. Father Christmas scratches his chin, looking very thoughtful. At last he says, slowly and carefully: “Ye-e-e-ss! I like it! It combines two essential ideas in just a few words: Cutting-edge twenty-first century technology - yes! - but also, it’s got its roots in something much older - rooted in tradition, you could say! Just the right image for a Father Christmas spin-off company. Let’s do it! ‘South-Sea bubble-wrap solutions it is!”

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We are at the North Pole again. It is midsummer’s day, that is mid-June, in the year 2050. A space-age style helicopter, driven by the newly developed anti-gravity bars, has just landed on the ice, and out step two jaunty figures. One of them is Father Christmas, seeming just a little older, a little less hair, and a few more wrinkles around his eyes, and just a little slower in his step, but still a spry

gentleman in the prime of middle age. The other, is Jim, the same tall slim figure, but somewhat stouter, graying a little, wearing an expensive-looking polar jacket, underneath which is a smart business suit. He is now the CEO of a global enterprise, "South-Sea Bubble-Wrap Solutions", a major spin-off from the parent company of Father Christmas Enterprises. Jim surveys the scene, glancing keenly with a professional's eye, at the sky, which has a somewhat dimmed brightness, with the sun glaring in a rather sullen fashion low down in the sky to the south, behind the silhouette of the helicopter. He has a thermometer in his hand.

Jim comments ". . .Bubble-wrap shield is as good here as anywhere I've seen, Santa. . . It's worked out just as we expected it would, way back in two thousand and eight - remember?"

"Sure do, Jim."

"And the temperature" - he rubs the condensation from the bulb "Minus thirty five degrees celsius - for mid-summer, that's about like it was in the mid-nineteenth century. That's OK, isn't it?"

"I'd say so "

Meanwhile Father Christmas is testing the ice, first stamping on it, then trying little jumps, then much more vigorous jumps. At last, satisfied with his tests, he declares "Ice seems firm enough Jim. Can't fault it. I think we should make plans to reopen a branch office here again."

"Awesome"

"Cool. I'm really stoked that we can get an office back in operation at the old place, after all these years. . .Give me the cell phone Jim . . . ."

He dials a number. "That you Rudolph? . .  
.Reception's not bad, eh Rudy, considering you're  
in New Zealand and we're at the North Pole. . .  
.Look Rudy, could you organize a team of reindeer  
to bring a whole lot of building materials up  
here . . .Computers and office equipment too . .  
.The whole lot . . . We're reopening the North  
Pole Office . . .the bubble-wrap plan has worked  
. . . like a dream."

THE END

Completed 27.05.08.