

TWAS THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS / Draft 15
devised by Douglas Rintoul

The setting is the North Pole on Christmas Eve.

Character:
The Santa Scientist.

As the Santa Scientist tells his story we move back into his memory. We see and hear what he's describing through a dense sound and video design. We he finishes each episode we dissolve back to the North Pole...to the present.

1. PREPPING THE MACHINES

A research station at the North Pole. It's Christmas Eve. It's dark and snowing. There's a lot of equipment: some of it covered in space-sheets, a tall antennae covered in satellite dishes and aerials, three machines which when spoken to respond in sound and flashing lights all very R2D2. There is a tent. The sound of Christmas.

An alarm clock rings from inside the tent. It stops.

The tent starts to wriggle.

The zip of the tent starts to open. There's a gloved hand. The zip opens more fully. The Santa scientist appears. He peers out. He sees the audience. He smiles. He gets out of the tent pours a cup of coffee.

Santa Scientist:

Cheers.

He drinks. Then he suddenly remembers.

It's Christmas Eve. It's Christmas Eve!

He goes to the tower turns on the power and the machines start to whirl. He lifts off the protective space-sheets off the machines one by one.

It's morning time Bob.

Bob says hello.

Wakey wakey Witherby.

Witherby says hello.

Rise and shine Livy.

Livy says hello.

He goes to Bob. Bob is the central machine.

Now Bob, where is Father Christmas?

Bob buffers but can't find the frequency. He tells SS.

You can't find him?

Bob replies.

Let me see.

SS puts in an earpiece picks up a portable antenna and holds it up. He tries to tune into the frequency of Father Christmas rather like tuning in a radio. He (as do we) hears different radio stations. He listens to each one carefully. 1st Canadian radio, 2nd Finnish radio and then 3rd a Russian station (big blasting military music).

Bob complains.

What's that Bob?

The main antenna's not working ? OK.

He climbs the big antennae, notices one of the satellite dishes isn't pointing quite in the right direction.

I think I see the problem.

He adjusts it and now he checks for the frequency again. We can hear it. It's the sound of the aurora borealis hence Father Christmas.

Now...where is Father Christmas?

He hits Bob's enter key. Bob scans, locks down and starts tracking. A pinging sonar sound. Looking at the screen...

He's not very far away!

The scanning and ETAs are computed. Ping!

And he's three minutes early. He's three minutes early!

Sees the audience. Smiles.

2. WELCOME TO THE NORTH POLE

You're probably all wondering what I'm doing?

I'm a Santa scientist and I'm up here at the North Pole trying to find Father Christmas.

Confessionally.

I've tried to find him twice before...but I missed him. But this time I'll see him.

Right here...in 41 minutes.

SS can see that the audience think he's a bit dotty.

When I was a boy I had no idea I'd become a Santa scientist. What I did know was that I wanted to work with machines.

It all started with the first present I ever remember getting from Father Christmas...it was a kit to make a radio.

The fond memories come flooding back as does sentimental music and the images of the past. It's all rather like that moment in films when the image wobbles like rippling water.

I spent all of Christmas Day putting it together. I didn't even stop for dinner. In the evening when it was finished, if I took it to the top of the house and held the aerial above my head I could get a really clear signal.

The sound of 'Do they know it's Christmas?'

That was the first machine I ever made. I've been making machines ever since. Like these. These are my Santa spotting machines.

And we're back in the North Pole.

This is Witherby the Weather Watcher. He watches the weather and tells me when it's just right for Father Christmas to land.

First, I have to catch a snowflake!

Picks up a scientific glass slide from Witherby's station, holds it up. Ping. The music of catching a snowflake.

He tries to catch/chase one of the falling snowflakes

The sound of him failing.

Almost.

He tries again fails. Witherby thinks this is funny.

Thank you Witherby.

On the third attempt he falls to the ground but just about catches one. The sound of catching a snowflake. He carefully takes it to Witherby the scanner machine.

When a snowflake falls from the sky it forms a shape. It's impossible to find two snow flakes in the whole world that are exactly the same.

Witherby responds excitedly.

Witherby scans the shape of the snowflake...

He inserts the slide and scans

...and from that he can tell me what the weather is going to be like and where exactly flying reindeer are going to land.

Witherby computes and prints out the results. Looks at slip. A tinge of excitement.

Right now the perfect conditions for Father Christmas' landing are just over there.

He points to horizon.

Now this... is 'Livy the Life Locator'.

Livy says hello.

Livy can detect living things near by.

He walks 'casually' in front of Livy's sensor and it erupts with sound like a metal detector.

See? She found me!

And if I turn her around

He turns Livy's sensor to face the audience, and she goes crazy. There's a lot of life forms!

She found all of you too.

So the moment Father Christmas appears I'll know. And so will you.

He's getting rather excited now, enjoying the company of the audience. Being a Santa Scientist has been a rather lonely journey.

I'd like you to listen to something. *Takes the headphones he was using to listen to the radio transmitter. Turns up the volume on the headphones and opens them to the audience so they can hear.*

The sounds of the aurora borealis.

That sound is coming from those green lights in the sky, they're called the northern lights. Some people say they are the spirits of dancing fairies, others say they're the tail of a giant magical fox.

Can you keep a secret? Those lights are messages from elves telling father Christmas where to deliver presents.

Looks at watch.

Let me tell you how I found out.

He moves his equipment and positions them to make a van.

Three Christmasses ago, I went to Scotland. To get there, I had to drive for a whole day. So I got up very early, climbed into my van...

He climbs into his imaginary van pick up the arial and uses it a steering wheel.

...and set off.

He travels and we here the sound of his speedy journey.

I didn't stop for lunch or for dinner or for tea.

The sound of gears changing, engine working hard. Fast and furious driving!

I drove for miles and miles until I reached the end of the land. It was getting dark. But I still hadn't arrived. To cross the sea, I had to take a boat.

He gets into an imaginary boat and starts rowing.

I rowed and rowed until I thought my arms would drop off. Until finally...I arrived.

The sound of a remote inner hebridean island.

The house I was staying in stood alone on a hill. It looked like no one had lived there for a long time. I opened the door.

He opens a door. It's very creaky.

Inside there was an old painting of a man.

He travels through the house

In the front room some kind person had lit a fire.

The painting of the old man winks.

In the bedroom there was a comfy looking bed.

He touches the imaginary bed and it squeaks.

Underneath the bed someone had left...this.

He finds a notebook.

An old notebook. Covered in dust.

He opens the book

It was full of maps, and strange drawings and pictures of Father Christmas. At the back was what looked like a poem. It was called 'A visit from St Nicholas'.

He sits down to read.

'Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the house

Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse;

The stockings were hung by the chimney with care,

In hopes that St. Nicholas soon would be there;

The children were nestled all snug in their beds,

While visions of sugar-plums danced in their heads;

And mamma in her 'kerchief, and I in my cap,

Had just settled down for a long winter's nap,

When out on the lawn there arose such a clatter,

I sprang from the bed to see what was the matter.

Away to the window I flew like a flash,

Tore open the shutters and threw up the sash.

The moon on the breast of the new-fallen snow

Gave the lustre of mid-day to objects below,

When, what to my wondering eyes should appear,

But a miniature sleigh, and eight tiny reindeer,

With a little old driver, so lively and quick,

I knew in a moment it must be St. Nick.

~~More rapid than eagles his coursers they came,~~

~~And he whistled, and shouted, and called them by name;~~

"Now, DASHER! now, DANCER! now, PRANCER and VIXEN!

On, COMET! on CUPID! on, DONDER and BLITZEN!

To the top of the porch! to the top of the wall!

Now dash away! dash away! dash away all!"

~~As dry leaves that before the wild hurricane fly,~~

~~When they meet with an obstacle, mount to the sky,~~

~~So up to the house top the coursers they flew,~~

~~With the sleigh full of toys, and St. Nicholas too.~~

And then, in a twinkling, I heard on the roof

The prancing and pawing of each little hoof.

As I drew in my hand, and was turning around,

Down the chimney St. Nicholas came with a bound.

~~He was dressed all in fur, from his head to his foot,~~

~~And his clothes were all tarnished with ashes and soot;~~

~~A bundle of toys he had flung on his back,~~

~~And he looked like a peddler just opening his pack.~~

His eyes -- how they twinkled! his dimples how merry!

His cheeks were like roses, his nose like a cherry!

~~His droll little mouth was drawn up like a bow,~~

~~And the beard of his chin was as white as the snow;~~

~~The stump of a pipe he held tight in his teeth,~~

~~And the smoke it encircled his head like a wreath;~~

He had a broad face and a little round belly,

That shook, when he laughed like a bowlful of jelly.

~~He was chubby and plump, a right jolly old elf,~~

~~And I laughed when I saw him, in spite of myself;~~

~~A wink of his eye and a twist of his head,~~

~~Soon gave me to know I had nothing to dread;~~

He spoke not a word, but went straight to his work,

And filled all the stockings; then turned with a jerk,

And laying his finger aside of his nose,

And giving a nod, up the chimney he rose;

He sprang to his sleigh, to his team gave a whistle,

And away they all flew like the down of a thistle.

But I heard him exclaim, ere he drove out of sight,

HAPPY CHRISTMAS TO ALL, AND TO ALL A GOOD-NIGHT!

I was sure that the person who wrote this really had seen Father Christmas. When I fell asleep that night I dreamt of Christmasses when I was small, and of the radio I had got as a boy.

Those sentimental sounds of Christmas past.

The sound of an alarm clock. It's day!

The next day I had a lot to do. I picked up my backpack, and went to climb the mountain.

He climbs a mountain.

When I got to the top, I was very happy but much too tired to do any work.

He climbs down slope.

I was so tired I was exhausted.

It's night. He collapses into the bed. Snores a little. Alarm clock! It's day again.

The next day I was stiff! And the climb was even more difficult.

He attempts the mountain but he's so stiff.

But as the days went by, I got faster and faster.

It's night and he collapses into bed. Alarm clock...it's day!

My last day was Christmas Eve and I was fit as a fiddle.

He repeats the climbing the mountain routine which he has now mastered (no falling of edges and being attacked by seagulls)

4. THE NORTHERN LIGHTS

He's climbed to the top.

And I had also built my first machine: a huge antenna.

He's climbed up to the top of the antennae. His one in the North Pole.

But it wasn't working properly. It was making a strange noise...

The green lights in the sky and their sound.

Look: the Northern Lights. Can they be making this noise?

I ran back to the house.

He does so. Plugs in his headphones into a machine.

I connected my headphones to my radio receiver.

I connected my radio receiver to my computer.

He sees a strange language on his computer.

It looks like words. But in a funny kind of writing I don't understand.

Elfish sounds.

I need a decoder.

Changes machine again. Script changes to English.

That's better. I can read this.

The words were names of people, and places where they lived, and I could even read some of the things these people had done.

'Georg Grünt, from Gorlitz in Gher - Germany got groceries for his Grandmother'.

'William Witherby from Worthing in West Sussex saved all of his pocket money and gave it to his local hospital'.

'Francoise Flancey from Fampoux in France wouldn't share her bonbons with her baby brother Benji'. Oh dear.

He realises.

They were all children. This was a list of everything all the children in the world had been doing. And there was only one person in the world who would need a list like that.

Father Christmas!

So that's how I became a Santa Scientist. I decided I was going to see him with my own eyes.

I'm going to find the best child in the whole world, someone who Father Christmas is definitely going to visit. Anywhere in the world. As long as it's someone really really good.

A eureka sound from the computer.

And there she was: 'Meera Madja from Mumbai India. Saved her brother from a Leopard attack'. From a leopard attack! This definitely must be the best child in the whole world.

We're going to India!

6. INDIA

He flies to India. Sound of plane take off.

I'd never been on a plane before. Up here it was another world

Sound of an airplane announcement. A reindeer flies past the window of the plane. And he lands. All fast. Sounds of Mumbai.

I landed in Mumbai

There must have been millions of people.

Father Christmas would be arriving at Meera's house at any moment and I had to find it!

He sets off backpack and ariel in hand. Bollywood style Christmas Music plays as he frantically whizzes through Mumbai.

I went past the Imperial Tower.

Whoosh.

Turned right at the domed mosque

Whoosh.

Right of the golden temple.

Whoosh.

And there it was... Inside was Meera and her brother nestled all snug in their beds.

The stockings were here hung by the chimney with care.

Not a creature was stirring. Perfect conditions.

We hear the sound *sounds of cow and monkeys.*

Shhh, shhhhh. Not a creature must be stirring!

The sound of a sonic boom.

I looked back into the room. The stockings were filled. Father Christmas had been. But how could I have missed him?

Fainter sound of the sonic boom with reverb.

I had missed him .

We dissolve back to the arctic.

How could I have been so stupid? Me a scientist? Father Christmas has to deliver to all the good children in the world in a single night. So he's fast. Really fast.

Faster than thunder...

Crash

...faster than a comet...

Whoosh

...faster than lightning.

Crash.

If you want to see him, you have to stay awake all night, and you can't even blink.

And that's why I'd missed him. I'd blinked.

He blinks.

But scientists don't give up. There has to be somewhere in the world where it's possible to see him. Maybe towards the end of the night, when he's starting to get tired.

I looked in the book.

He opens the book it unravels stretching all the way along the stage. It's full of information and pictures etc. Until finally....

Hawaii!?!?

"If you want to see Father Christmas like I did go to Hawaii. There he will arrive at his final stop in a canoe on the sea pulled by a team of eight dolphins." Puh! Dolphins! "And because it will

be the very end of Christmas Eve, he will slow down just enough for you to see him - if you are quick."

Right. We're going to Hawaii.

7. HAWAII

Takes off again. This time a dolphin flies past the window. *Lands and out through automatic doors.*

I landed in Hawaii, I couldn't believe it, Christmas Eve, and it was hot, really hot. I was going to need a change of clothes.

Turns round takes jacket off revealing a Hawaiian shirt.

I strolled off 'leisurely' across the island to find the last house on the island where Father Christmas would visit. And there it was.

I looked inside I saw a family having dinner and ... yes! Two stockings "hung with care in hopes that St. Nicholas soon would be there". And from the dunes I had a perfect view of the house and of the sea where Father Christmas would arrive in a canoe pulled by dolphins. Mmmm *looks at watch* I had arrived with plenty of time to spare...

What to do in Hawaii on Christmas Eve?

He suddenly *surfs, the crashing sound of water and the Beach Boys. He tumbles and falls underwater landing on the beach.*

That was exhausting. I meandered back to the sand dunes to wait for Father Christmas.

He waits and gently starts to fall asleep. He tries to keep his eyes open. Falls asleep.

Sonic boom.

That sound. No! No! No!

It can't have been. Can it?

I crept up to the house. His work was already done! The stockings were filled! I had missed him again. Where were the dolphins? Why hadn't he slowed down?

The sun was already up. The night before Christmas was over.

Dissolves back to the North Pole.

After two failed attempts, India and Hawaii, I came here, the coldest place on earth. The North Pole. This is the only place in the world I know Father Christmas will slow down and stop...his home.

All I needed now was to know exactly when he would arrive, and that's why I invented, Bob,

Say hello to Bob.

Bob says hello.

Bob's listening to the messages coming from the northern lights...and what they're telling Bob right now is Father Christmas has almost completed his super sonic journey across the earth.

A few moments ago Father Christmas arrived at his last stop, Hawaii. As soon as he leaves there he'll return home, to here. *(screen)* To here. *(stage)*

When he does, Bob will let me know...he'll set off an alarm.

Bob sets off the alarm. An automated voice...all very HAL.

"Father Christmas arrival in three minutes"

Thank you Bob not yet.

He's on his way!!

Thanks Bob! Right Livy, right Witherby, show us what you've got!

They respond excitedly. They overwork, making a lot of noise and explode. Smoke and darkness.

Wait I need to do the scan first.

No, no, no.

How am I going to find Father Christmas?

He mumbles.

'Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the house

Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse;

The stockings were hung by the chimney with care,

In hopes that St. Nicholas soon would be there;

The children were nestled all ...

Of course the children...the children.

Father Christmas hasn't left any presents for you yet. And I know you're good. So he'll have to come here.

Arrival of Father Christmas and snow. All sound and light like 'Close Encounters of the Third Kind'. A present flies in from the sky.

He unwraps the paper. The snow ends, Father Christmas leaves. He opens it it's the radio he received as a kid.

We hear Father Christmas' voice from the sky.

Father Christmas:

Happy Christmas to all and to all a good night.

Looks at the children in the audience.

But didn't Father Christmas leave any presents for you?

Bob speaks.

Bob you're alive.

Bob speaks.

Where?

He goes behind the rostra , returns with a Santa sack

Father Christmas did leave presents for you. I think there's enough for everyone. Come on over.

Hands out presents.

Thank you everyone for helping me find Father Christmas. I wish you all a very safe journey back to England.