

Christmas Madness!!!!

A Very Demented Christmas Special

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St. Nicholas

In the farthest, northern reaches of the known (and not-so-known) world, in a forest as old as time, there lives a wizard who goes by the name Nicholas of Myrna, but whom everyone else variously calls “Saint Nicholas,” “Good Ol’ Saint Nick,” or “That Fat, Red Bastard,” depending on their particular outlook on life. He’s not an especially jolly man, contrary to popular belief. In fact, he’s rather neurotic, but we’ll get to that a little later.

Nicholas was born in the long lost and forgotten city of Myrna, living an unexceptional life until he was old enough to know just about everything there was to know (in other words, the ripe old age of sixteen.) He decided then that his entire life was leading him to the ecclesiastical calling and so he gave away his worldly possessions and went knocking on the nearest monastery door. After a week of petitioning, the monks finally relented and admitted to him into their esteemed order. Nicholas was sure that the fates had something in mind for him, and they did, actually, but it wasn’t at all what he had imagined for himself. It turned out that the gods just didn’t like him. They wouldn’t talk to him, not even a little bit, they wouldn’t acknowledge him, they just didn’t seem to care that he existed. The abbot of the monastery felt sorry of Nicholas, because the boy tried so hard and all for naught, and he couldn’t, in good conscience, show him the door. So, he hired a tutor for the boy, hoping, perhaps, to interest him eventually in a nice, stable secular profession (like chimney sweeping, for instance.) The years passed, and Nicholas learned much. In fact, he probably learned a little too much: Unknown to the abbot (or anyone else in the monastery, for that matter), the boy’s tutor had been teaching him the arcane arts. This didn’t become evident until mid-morning prayer in his 10th year there, when instead of reciting his daily absolutions he, in a careless moment, spoke the words to a *fireball* spell and inadvertently sent it rolling down the center aisle of the church. The poor abbot never stood a chance, especially bent over like he was picking up that fallen chalice, his back to the pews preventing him from seeing it coming until too it was too late. After that incident, both were sent packing.

He spent years wandering the world, learning all he could, still filled with the desire to make

a difference in the world, to fulfill the destiny he just knew awaited him. Everywhere he went, he made friends; and when he took his leave of them, left them with exquisite, finely crafted magical trinkets with which to remember him. As time went by, as it is wont to do, the magic Nicholas wielded began to increasingly obsess him. The magic, he knew, was the key to it all. He traveled to the greatest libraries to research long forgotten incantations, journeyed to the remote hermitages of the masters to learn at their feet (when they would take him in), and quested after the most powerful artifacts so that he might reverse engineer them to learn more.

After 300 hundred years of this, two resurrections, and one unexpected reincarnation into his current half-elfin form, Nicholas retired to the remote lands of the far north, making his home in the branches of a towering tree he fondly called *Gnome* (no relation to the other one), located in the enchanted forest of *Gnortepohl*. His life from that point forward became dedicated to the idea that he would bring happiness to every living creature (well, at the very least those with half a brain and the sentience to recognize his good deeds), and that in doing so he would *make a difference* — a large difference, one that could not possibly go unnoticed and would never, ever be forgotten. That is all he has ever wanted. Well, that and greatness. Making a difference is the means to greatness, and, truth be told, that is what he really, really wants. *Greatness*. The word just rolls off the tongue, doesn’t it? Like ambrosia, or really good butter. Nicholas seems to think so.

Unfortunately, the magic to which he is so attached has gradually eroded his sanity, though he still manages to hang on to reality by the slimmest of threads. In the last five hundred years, he has become obsessed with the idea of giving gifts to other people, sort of by way of introduction. Once he’s in their good graces, he reasons, they will begin to pay attention to him and the greatness for which he’s destined. Sure, it’s bribery, but he doesn’t care. As long as they like the gifts, then they are happy, and as long as they are happy then his mission is succeeding. He has even turned his once stately tree house into a massive gift-making factory, going so far as to ‘hire’ (more like coerce) the local frost giants into working for him (unfortunately, they

are all too tall to fit through the doors or into the tree proper, and so he had to remedy that problem, much to their utter dismay.)

St. Nicholas is a chubby, ruddy-cheeked little half-elf with a snowy white beard. He favors the color red, from his days in the monastery (the bishops there all wore red as a badge of their office and rank) although in the springtime he's not above wearing green now and again. When he laughs, the sound is deep and hearty. One habit he picked up from his frost giant employees was shouting out "ho, ho, ho!" when laughing at really amusing things. Apparently, it's their equivalent of clapping.

It is popularly thought that if enough people eventually pay attention to him, the gods will gift him with the ability to deliver all of his gifts to every person within the span of single night. So far, that hasn't happened, but he does manage pretty well despite being temporally challenged. In the northern cultures closest to his homeland, almost half of any given population receives a visit from him on Wintertide Eve. The further south you go, though, the less likely of meeting any one who has even heard of him - especially in those places at the bottom of the world where summer is winter and vice-versa. (One year, he decided to introduce the upside-downers to the concept of Wintertide but was driven off by Ruprecht Coalteeth, Nicholas' former protégé and assistant, who claims those lands as his own and celebrates Summer Solstice with their people in his own, unique manner. Saint Nicholas' current assistant, The Budelfrau, has drawn up plans for a peaceful takeover of the upside-down but it will be years before they have enough resources to follow through.)

St. Nicholas, 20th-Level Half-Elf Wizard: CR 20; Size M (5 ft., 5 in. tall); HD 20d4+40; hp 94; Init +1 (Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 11 (+1 Dex); Attack +11/+6 melee, or +11/+6 ranged; SA Spell-like abilities; SQ Polyglot, immortal; AL CN; SV Fort +8, Ref +7, Will +16; Str 12, Dex 12, Con 14, Int 23, Wis 18, Cha 12

Skills: Alchemy +20, Appraise +8.5, Bluff +6.5, Concentration +19, Craft (toy making) +20, Diplomacy +13, Hide +5.5, Knowledge (arcana) +20, Knowledge (geography) +20, Listen +16, Move Silently +7, Search +7, Sense Motive +12.5, Spellcraft +10, Spot +7, Use Rope +7.5; **Feats:** Alertness, Craft Magic Arms and Armor, Craft Rod, Craft Staff, Craft Wand, Craft Wondrous Item, Enlarge Spell, Extend

Spell, Maximize Spell, Scribe Scroll, Skill Focus (Craft [toy making]), Silent Spell

SA-Spell-like Abilities (Sp): He may cast the following spell at will: *alter self, enlarge, feather fall, reduce, and speak with animals.*

SQ-Immortal (Ex): Nicholas never ages, and he has the following immortal abilities: Damage Reduction 15/+1, SR 12 and absolute immunity to both poison and disease.


SQ-Polyglot (Sp): He is the master of language because his gift-giving duty eventually takes him to all parts of the world. This ability functions exactly like the 3rd level spell *tongues* and is always in effect.

Languages: All

Wizard Spells Known (4/6/6/5/5/5/4/4/4): 0-arcane mark, dancing lights, daze, detect magic, detect poison, disrupt undead, flare, ghost sound, light, mage hand, mending, open/close, prestidigitation, ray of frost, read magic, resistance; 1st-charm person, detect secret doors, expeditious retreat, hypnotism, identify, mage armor, magic missile, silent image, sleep, spider climb, summon monster I, ventriloquism; 2nd-blur, cat's grace, continual flame, invisibility, mirror image, see invisibility, summon monster II; 3rd-blink, dispel magic, clairaudience/clairvoyance, fly, gaseous form, gust of wind, haste, hold person, magic circle against law, nondetection, shrink item, slow, suggestion, summon monster III; 4th-arcane eye, charm monster, detect scrying, dimension door, ice path, improved invisibility, lesser geas, locate creature, minor globe of invulnerability, polymorph other, polymorph self, summon monster IV, wall of ice; 5th-cone of cold, dismissal, dominate person, hold monster, permanency, summon monster V, teleport, wall of iron, wall of stone; 6th-analyze dweomer, antimagic field, contingency, eyebite, mislead, otluke's freezing sphere; 7th-greater scrying, mass invisibility, power word (stun), sequester, teleport without error; 8th-discern location, protection from spells, power word (blind), summon monster VIII; 9th-astral projection, dominate monster, foresight, freedom, gate, refuge, shapechange, teleportation circle, time stop.

Possessions: Red *Vestments of Faith* with white, fur trim (Damage Reduction 5/+5), *Bag of Holding (type 4)*, *Boots of Speed*, *Wintertide Staff*

Artifact-Wintertide Staff: This a 6-foot length of stout, blackened Gnortepohl wood adorned with perpetually fresh holly and mistletoe. St. Nicholas carries it with him everywhere



he goes, indispensable as it is to his life's work. The staff has the following spell-like abilities: animal shapes, control weather, reverse gravity, time stop and word of recall. Each may be used five times per day. He may also use the staff to

cast the following spells at will: *awaken*, *find the path*, *freedom of movement* and *wind walk*. All spells are cast as by a 20th level druid. His assistant, The Budelfrau, gave this staff to him centuries ago as a gift.

St. Nick's Little Helpers

Nicholas might be good at what he does but he certainly couldn't do it all alone and hope to have enough time to actually go out and give away the gifts he makes.

About 500 years ago he talked a local tribe of frost giants into helping him out. Okay, he didn't actually talk them into anything (have you ever tried getting a frost giant to do *anything* you wanted?) Rather, he permanently shrunk them down the size of dwarves (so that they might fit into his tree house) and had a racial *geas* put on them. The shrunken frost giants have been in his thrall ever since, living out their lives in a village built below the tree in the underground network of its roots, reproducing and having little shrunken giant children, and resenting every single day of their slave lifestyle. Day-in and day-out they ascend to the factory built in the tree's mid-level to work on countless gifts and toys for people they never even met (though, if given the chance, they'd love to have just five minutes in room with any of them, to show them a little Wintertide cheer up close and personal-like) Nicholas is kind enough to them, but let's face it: If given the choice between working in a medieval sweat-shop for an insane, goody two-shoes wizard or living free out on the vast, icy tundra, hunting dire animals and pillaging human villages for fun, which would you pick? If you were a frost giant, that is.

That's exactly how they think, too, my friend

Little Helper Craftsman, 2nd-Level Shrunken Frost Giant Expert (Toy making); CR 10; Size S (3 ft., 0 in. tall); HD 14d8+28 + 2d6+4; hp 104; Init +1 (Dex); Spd 40 ft.; AC 20 (+1 size, +1 Dex, +9 natural); Attack +15/+10 melee (1d8+3, hammer [crit x2]), or +13/+8 ranged (1d4, sling [crit x3]); SA Rock throwing; SQ Rock catching, cold subtype; AL NE; SV Fort +11, Ref +5, Will +6; Str 17, Dex 13, Con 15, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 11

Skills: Animal Empathy +3, Balance +4, Climb +7, Craft (toy making) +5, Diplomacy

+3, Disguise +3, Hide +5, Jump +7, Listen +2, Move Silently +3, Search +3, Spot +10, Use Rope +3; *Feats:* Cleave, Great Cleave, Point Blank Shot, Power Attack, Sunder. Expert class skills are Animal Empathy, Balance, Craft, Diplomacy, Disguise, Hide, Listen, Move Silently, Search, and Use Rope.

SA-Rock Throwing (Ex): Adult Little Helpers are accomplished rock throwers and receive a +1 racial bonus to attack rolls when throwing rocks. Because of their strength, they can throw boulders or logs weighing up to 10 lbs up to 3 range increments.

SQ-Cold Subtype (Ex): Cold immunity; double damage from fire except on a successful save.

SQ-Rock Catching (Ex): A Little Helper can catch Small or Medium sized rocks (or projectiles of similar shape). Once per round, a Little Helper that would normally be hit by a rock of either size can make a Reflex save to catch it as a free action. The DC is 15 for a Small rock and 20 for a Medium-size one. (If the projectile has a magical bonus to attack, the DC increases by that amount.) The Little Helper must be ready for and aware of the attack.

Languages: Common, Giant, Gnoll, Goblin, Orc

Possessions: Excellent quality lederhosen, shirt, shoes, socks, etc., *hammer* +2, felt hat with feather.

Little Helper Guardian, 2nd-Level Shrunken Frost Giant Warrior; CR 10; Size S (4 ft., 1 in. tall); HD 14d8+28 + 2d8+4; hp 110; Init +1 (Dex); Spd 40 ft.; AC 28 (+1 size, +1 Dex, +9 natural, +6 armor, +1 shield); Attack +16/+11/+6 melee (1d8+3, battleaxe [crit x3]), or +15/+10/+5 ranged (1d6, short bow [crit x2]); SA Rock throwing; SQ Rock catching, cold subtype; AL NE; SV Fort +14, Ref +5, Will +4; Str 17, Dex 13, Con 15, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 11

Skills: Climb +7, Handle Animal +3, Hide -6, Jump +7, Move Silently -5, Spot +10, Swim +8; *Feats:* Cleave, Great Cleave, Power Attack,

Sunder, Weapon Focus (shortbow, composite). Climb, Hide, Jump, and Move Silently skills reduced by -7 armor check penalty.

SA-Rock Throwing (Ex): Adult Little Helpers are accomplished rock throwers and receive a +1 racial bonus to attack rolls when throwing rocks. Because of their strength, they can throw boulders or logs weighing up to 10 lbs up to 3 range increments.

SQ-Cold Subtype (Ex): Cold immunity; double damage from fire except on a successful save.

SQ-Rock Catching (Ex): A Little Helper can

catch Small or Medium sized rocks (or projectiles of similar shape). Once per round, a Little Helper that would normally be hit by a rock of either size can make a Reflex save to catch it as a free action. The DC is 15 for a Small rock and 20 for a Medium-size one. (If the projectile has a magical bonus to attack, the DC increases by that amount.) The Little Helper must be ready for and aware of the attack.

Languages: Common, Giant

Possessions: Banded mail, excellent quality clothes, *battleaxe* +2, small wooden shield

The Best Toys Ever

St. Nicholas might be nuttier than a Wintertide almond-cake, but he certainly knows how to make beautiful gifts for people. His shrunken giant artisans are some of the best in the world, and this, more than anything else, garners him the adoration of children everywhere (“get their attention while they’re young,” says he.) The toys coming out of his shop are unparalleled. Gew-gaws, widgets, thing-ma-bobs, doo-hickies, whatchamacallits and you-know-what-I’m-talking-about of every conceivable shape, size, color, function and form are made in his factory. If a child can dream it, then St. Nick can make it (or yell at one of his shrunken giants to make it, which is more likely considering all the paperwork he has to contend with nowadays.) Toys from the Wintertide factory are of such high quality that they are worth three or four times as much as the same kind of toys found in average shops made by average artisans.

Children (and even a lot of adults) typically write to Nicholas asking for specific toys or gifts, and if time permits (and the shrunken giant foreman who reads the letters isn’t feeling overly cranky that day), they usually get what they want. (There isn’t any ‘list’ and there certainly isn’t any ‘checking it twice’ - who’s got the time for all that? Besides, Nicholas wants mindshare; he doesn’t give a rat’s hoo-ha about naughty and nice.)

The shrunken giants in Nicholas’ employ are bitter, to say the least. If given the opportunity, they will do what they can to cause no small amount of mischief. Unfortunately for them, the geas that dominates them also prevents them from getting away with as much as they would like (such as, say, tying their employer to a

stake and burning down the whole god-cursed forest around his big, dopey ears.) Every once in while, however, they manage to smuggle in enchanted wood from the Gnortepohl forest in lieu of the oak or willow imported from other regions, to build “special” dolls for all the little kiddies. At first, one such doll might seem harmless enough. It is only when exposed to high concentrations of magic (such as the kind perpetually surrounding St. Nicholas) that it begins to ‘awaken’, coming to life and into a consciousness all its own. Because of the gradual nature of this transformation and the fact that the magic saturation takes so long, the dolls don’t often awaken before the morning of Wintertide day. Once they do, though, all hell breaks loose.

Golem, Toy

Small Construct

Hit Dice: 5d10 (25 hp)

Initiative: +2 (Dex)

Speed: 20 ft.

AC: 16 (+1 Dex, +1 size, +4 natural)

Attacks: Slam +5 melee; head toss +5 ranged

Damage: Slam 1d2+2 subdual; or head toss 1d4+2

Face/Reach: 5 ft. by 5 ft. / 5 ft.

Special Attacks: Charm, head toss

Special Qualities: Construct, magic immunity, damage reduction 10/+1

Saves: Fort +1, Ref +3, Will -3

Abilities: Str 15, Dex 14, Con -, Int 3, Wis 3, Cha 20

Feats: Blind-Fight





Climate/Terrain: Any

Organization: Solitary

Challenge Rating: 2

Treasure: None

Alignment: Chaotic neutral

Advancement Range: 6-8 HD (Small)

For the short time they live, toy golems like nothing better than playing with people. While this may seem like a kid's dream come true, having a living, walking, talking doll to buddy around with, it is actually big problem. Namely, because the doll has never had the benefit of a normal socialization, having only been alive and conscious for a tiny amount of time.

Combat

A toy golem's toy body lends it an innate, overpowering sense of purpose that dominates its brief existence: Play, play, play and more play. Any game or prank, no matter how dangerous, is acceptable. Gods help the child that doesn't cooperate, for the golem is a hundred times more petulant than the crankiest three year old. Entire households have been leveled by a tantrum throwing toy golem, and it usually takes a small army to get one under control.

Charm (Sp): The toy golem can use this as per the spell *charm person* cast at 5th level once every 4 rounds as a free action. Targets are allowed a Will save (DC 16) to resist the *charm*. Once a character has been charmed, the toy golem usually commands him to "play." If under attack, then it expects its new owner(s) to defend it.

Head Toss (Su): The toy golem may pull its head off and throw it as an attack. This is a grenade-like attack that does no splash damage. Anyone within range of the head's area effect (30 ft.) must make a Will save (DC 14) or become dazed as per the spell *hypnotism* cast at 7th level. Once detached from the golem's body, the head becomes a large egg painted with a happy face; it shatters upon impact and leaves behind a nasty, yolky residue. The golem may only use this ability only once. A headless toy golem cannot see or hear, but it can still vaguely sense where it is and the conditions of its surroundings. It can't communicate, but that is not much of problem for it since communicating is one of the things it doesn't do so well anyway. Usually, the head toss is a last-ditch attempt to subdue the "bullies" attacking it.

Magic Immunity (Ex): Toy golems are immune to all spells, spell-like abilities, and

supernatural effects, except as follows: Toy golems are susceptible to all plant-affecting magic, such as warp wood, wood shape, diminish plant and so on, however. The effects of these spells are effectively doubled and the golem receives no saving throw to resist them.

Feats: A toy golem receives the Blind Fight feat for free.

Construction

A toy golem must be made with *Gnortepohl* wood, a highly enchanted wood that can achieve limited sentience on its own if exposed to large quantities magical energy - as such, the cost making the golem is the same as for making a normal doll. Creating the body requires a successful Craft (toy making) check (DC 15). The doll must be within 10 ft. of a source of magic (or multiple sources) for the casting of 40 cumulative spell levels. Once the last spell has been cast, it awakens and remains "alive" only for 5 hours.

The Budelfrau

There aren't many words to describe The Budelfrau. "A chain lightning bolt trapped in a glass jar," might work, though.

She's a rail thin human who looks to be about 30, maybe 35, years old. Her hair varies in color according to the season: In the summer it's bright, golden blonde, while in the winter it's as black as the darkest depths of night. In autumn it turns fiery gold-orange like the leaves in the southern lands, and in the spring it becomes a verdant green. Her eyes, probably the most striking thing about her (besides her personality), are a shiny, silvery gray color. No one knows what her real name is, or why she likes to be called "The Budelfrau" (and you just better capitalize the 'T' in 'The' when you say it, or you might find yourself sleeping with the squirrels...whatever that means.) A few centuries ago, she first became aware of St. Nicholas when his band of shrunken giants raided her forest looking for albino tiger pelts in order to make an extra-special gift for an empress in one of the myriad human kingdoms to the south. Being both a druid and an animal lover to the *n*th degree, The Budelfrau sent the shrunken giants back to him via a very large catapult. That was the beginning of a small, short-lived 'war' between the two. In the end, Nicholas confessed his undying love for her and she

for him, and that was that, as the playwrights might write. She still hasn't moved in with him (she's not *that* kind of lady), but she nonetheless spends most of her free time in his company.

While she doesn't entirely think his gift-giving scheme will work, ultimately, she still supports his endeavor. In fact, it was she who introduced him to the idea of using a big sleigh pulled by teams of wild animals to transport his gifts - of course, the first year he did that he didn't make it past the first glacier and Wintertide was cancelled (too much snow and not enough motivation for the animals, it seemed.) The following year, she showed him how to get the animals to 'fly' using the *wind walk* spell, and that seemed to work quite well until the spell expired and he, the sleigh full of goodies, and all those poor animals plummeted hundreds of feet. Nicholas was okay, if you can overlook two broken legs and a broken arm but, again, Wintertide was cancelled for the second year in a row. (That almost brought an end to their relationship, but Nick couldn't bring himself to break up with her as he, well, um, needed someone to help him with his nether regions *post-evacuation* while his bones mended inside the bulky casts, and he certainly didn't trust any of his shrunken giant employees with the task.) Finally, on the third year, The Budelfrau presented him a gift *par excellence* — the Wintertide Staff, which would allow him to keep his sleigh team elevated indefinitely.

Lately, she's been trying to get him to expand his business to the opposite side of the world, to the upside-down. He has told her repeatedly (especially after that one failed takeover attempt) that he's not ready for that market, that he still hasn't finished covering the downside-up. No one else can understand her sudden interest in Ruprecht Coalteeth's territory, though some of the shrunken giant foremen gossip that she and Coalteeth might be having an affair, as unlikely as it seems. The other topic regarding The Budelfrau that is a favorite for morning chitchat around the water bole is regarding her unnatural longevity (she has been with St. Nicholas for at least five hundred years.) It's obvious that she's not yet relying on a device of some sort (such as a Ring of the Mummy), or an elixir (such as the kind Nicholas imbibed all those years ago.) She's also not skilled enough in the druidic arts to extend her life indefinitely. As such, they suspect that she's not who she says she is: After all, who calls themselves "*The anything*" unless they've got whopping huge

secret to hide or a bucket load of insecurities? What else do they have to do in their spare time besides think the worst of their employer's one and only true love? (It doesn't help that The Budelfrau seems to harbor a perpetual mad-on at the little guys; she is constantly haranguing them for *this, that* and *the other*. Not to mention the fact she really delights in sic'ing her furball friends on them at every available opportunity. The shrunken giants don't hate her. They *loathe* her.)

The Budelfrau has an extremely energetic personality, so much so that it can be overwhelming to the uninitiated. Not only does she talk a mile a minute, but she also hops from topic to topic in the span of seconds. Having a conversation with her is like talking to ten people whose mouths have been *hasted*. She has no patience for the slow-witted or the indecisive, nor does she tolerate people who don't have the drive to not only succeed but to do it in record time. If there is one trait to her personality that overshadows all others, it is that she is relentless.


The Budelfrau, 14th-Level Human Druid:
CR 14; Size M (5 ft., 1 in. tall); HD 14d8+28; hp 88; Init +4 (Dex); Spd 30 ft.; AC 17 (+4 Dex, +3 hide armor); Attack +15/+11 melee (1d6+1, scimitar [crit 18-20/x2]) or +13/+9 melee two-weapon primary, +12 melee two-weapon secondary (1d4+1, dagger [crit 19-20/x2]), or +17/+12 ranged (1d4, dagger [crit 19-20/x2]); SQ Nature sense, woodland stride, trackless step, resist nature's lure, wild shape, venom immunity, a thousand faces; SV Fort +11, Ref +8, Will +14; AL NG; Str 12, Dex 19, Con 14, Int 13, Wis 20, Cha 12

Skills: Animal Empathy +11, Handle Animal +13, Heal +21, Hide +4, Intuit Direction +21, Jump +3, Knowledge (Nature) +15, Listen +5, Move Silently +4, Scry +18, Spellcraft +16, Spot +5; *Feats:* Ambidexterity, Combat Casting, Craft Wand, Enlarge Spell, Extend Spell, Two-Weapon Fighting

Languages: Common, Druidic, Goblin

Possessions: Hide clothes and armor, +4 scimitar, +3 dagger, Brass Horn of Valhalla, Wand (Polymorph Self, 32 charges), Broom of Flying

Druid Spells Prepared (6/7/6/5/5/4/3/2): 0-cure minor wounds, flare, guidance, light, mending, resistance; 1-animal friendship, calm animals, cure light wounds, entangle, invisibility to animals, magic fang, pass without a trace; 2-animal trance, barkskin, hold animal, lesser restoration, resist elements, speak with animals,



tree shape; 3-cure moderate wounds, dominate animal, neutralize poison, remove disease, water breathing; 4-cure serious wounds, dispel magic, flame strike, reincarnate, sleet storm; 5-animal growth, commune with nature, cure critical wounds, tree stride; 6-greater dispelling, healing circle, summon nature's ally VI; 7-heal, wind walk

Reindeer Games

As has been mentioned before, The Budelfrau introduced St. Nicholas to the idea of transporting all those gifts of his by means of a sleigh and sleigh team. This has had varied success over the years, and they haven't quite got the concept perfected yet. The Budelfrau loves animals, perhaps more than anything else in this world, so it was natural for her to come up with the suggestion (just so long as the animals aren't abused or hurt, which, if you must know the truth, is a hell of a lot easier said than done, especially when you consider the brains behind the operation.)

The first year they tried it, they used huskies to pull the sleigh across the tundra - they are good, strong and pleasant animals, happy to work for their food, but within certain limits. They pulled the sleigh for about a day before they became both tired and indignant, and refused to pull it any further. It had also taken them so long to reach the first glacier (out of seven) that Nick knew they'd never make it south in time. The second year, The Budelfrau came up with the idea of having a team of dogs pull the sleigh through the air, but as you may have read, that really didn't work. And the third year, when they finally got the magic down pat and successfully drove the sleigh south, they shortly discovered that horses weren't exactly the best choice of animal (having gotten fed up with dogs in the previous two years.) Their hooves didn't do so well on the icy roofs and at the second house, they all slid off the building, three of them breaking their necks.

In the years since, they have tried various animals as well as various combinations of animals to pull the sleigh containing the Wintertide gifts. Reindeer were popular for a while, but they are skittish and easily frightened by stray cats and dogs, burglars, city watch, and the like. On more than one occasion, Nicholas and The Budelfrau came up through a chimney (their preferred ingress/egress) to find the sleigh half a mile away because some insensitive bastard

lobbed a few spears at them. After they gave up on reindeer, they switched to woolly mammoths, reasoning that not many people would dare assault twelve of the furry buggers. That much was true. Unfortunately, mammoths weigh a lot and Nicholas is still apologizing to this day to the descendants of the survivors from the family on whose house he first parked the sleigh team. They've also tried polar bears (no good because they fall asleep way too often on the job), dire tigers (they tend to use the houses for scratching posts, definitely not a good way to impress people), shrunken giants (the *geas* that commands them might make them excellent factory workers, but it does nothing for their social behavior in the south - mammoths made a better impression than these brutes), rats (requires about a ten thousand, and if even a small fraction of them escape by gnawing through their harnesses, the sleigh is stranded), and moose (more confrontational than just about any other animal known to mankind, and smelly - oh god, so smelly. It's enough to make your hair bleed.)

At this point, you're probably wondering why Nicholas and The Budelfrau don't just scrap the idea of a sleigh to transport all those goodies and just resort to good old fashioned teleportation or some such magic? Well, I don't know either. In all likelihood, because it is easier than trying to manage 30 heavy, overstuffed bags of holding while flying at high speed through air, and it beats teleporting into unfamiliar places where the probability of emerging inside a brick wall is as high as not. And it's definitely the more romantic method. Usually. When it works, that is.

This year The Budelfrau has been inspired by her latest animal companion, a cute little shark she befriended swimming about near the lost kingdom of Atlantis eating stray humans. She outfitted him with an enchanted harness she discovered there that allows him to live in the air as if he were underwater, flying him around (when the harness isn't malfunctioning) and terrorizing the shrunken giants just because it's fun and she can. She has suggested to St. Nicholas that the sleigh team this year consist of flying sharks, led, hopefully, by her friend, Knuckalkopf. And if there is a lot of fog this year, as there was last year, she'll put an illumination spell on him to guide the way.

Knuckalkopf (Animal Companion), Land Shark: CR 4; SZ H (25 ft. 3 in. long); HD 10d8+20; hp 73; Init +3 (Dex); Spd Flop around

5 ft., swim 60 ft.; AC 15 (-2 size, +2 Dex, +5 natural); Attack +10 melee (bite 2d6+7); Face/Reach 10 ft. by 20 ft./10 ft.; SQ Keen Scent; SV Fort +9, Ref +10, Will +3; AL N; Str 20, Dex 17, Con 15, Int 1, Wis 10, Cha 2

SQ-Keen Scent (Ex): A shark can notice creatures by scent in a 180-foot radius and detect blood in the air or on the ground at ranges of up to a mile.

Skills: Listen +6, Spot +6

Possessions: Atlantean Harness

Wondrous Item-Atlantean Harness: This device is complex looking series of dyed leather straps and bronze buckles that designed to be worn by a giant sea horse, allowing for a rider but more importantly allowing the creature to move and breathe in the air as it would in water. This particular harness has been adapted to Knuckalkopf's body but has also been damaged slightly sometime in the recent past _- on any given day, roll 1d20. If the result is 5 or less, then the shark may not air swim for 24 hours (but he can still breathe and feed as per normal.)

Caster level: 12th; *Prerequisites:* Craft Wondrous Item, *freedom of movement, resist elements, water breathing;* *Market price:* 12,000 gp; *Weight:* 27 lbs.



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