

## A Global Warming Christmas

by Keith West

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Jack glumly watched the old man put the last package in place. It was almost time for him to leave. The old man stepped back, examined his work, and finding it to his satisfaction, turned and headed Jack's way.

Jack wasn't expecting that.

"Want to ride with me?" he asked.

"Me?" Jack squeaked, his voice pitched higher than usual.

"Yes, you," the old man said, not unkindly. "Who did you think I was talking to?"

Jack wasn't expecting this offer, either. He didn't know what to say.

"C'mon, Jack. It'll do you good. You've been moping around here for far too long. Get out and see the world a little. It's what you used to do."

"Yeah, I know. It's just that..."

Jack kicked a mound of snow. Powder swirled up, and a gust of wind blew it on the old man. The powdery snow formed swirls and spirals as it settled on the man's coat. The old man didn't seem to notice, or if he did, he didn't care. He smiled, and when he did, his cheeks, already red, got brighter.

"It's just what?"

"It's, you know."

"No, I don't know. Now tell me. And be quick about it. I've got a schedule to keep."

"The last few years haven't been easy for me. I have to work twice as hard as I used to. Anything I make, it doesn't last."

The old man put his pipe in his mouth and drew deep on it. He exhaled a cloud of smoke.

“That’s the way it’s always been. Remember?”

Instead of arguing, Jack made a snowball and threw it as far as he could. It disappeared over a rise. The splash it made was clearly audible.

“Hear that?” Jack asked. “Global warming.”

“True,” said the old man. He released another cloud of smoke. It smelled vaguely of peppermint and apples, cinnamon and pine boughs.

“But we aren’t sinking yet,” he continued. “And we won’t. Not for a long time, if ever.”

“What makes you say that?”

“Because even though we exist in the natural world, we aren’t part of it. If we were, do you think I could do the things I do?”

A sly look passed across Jack’s face. “You mean like make a video game console out of wood?”

The old man laughed. It was a huge, belly-shaking laugh full of mirth. It seemed to go on and on. Finally it stopped. The old man wiped a tear from his eye with a finger.

“Very good, Jack. Very good. Have you been peeking in my workshop windows?”

“No, they frost over before I get there. You should know that.”

The old man smiled.

“So whaddaya say, Jack? Wanna ride with me. I could use the help. Most of the children have asked for snow this Christmas. I can’t fly the sleigh and give it to them at the same time.”

“Okay,” said Jack Frost. “I’m in.”

“Good”, said Santa. “Just don’t go nipping at my nose.”