

The Aspect Xmas Diary

We've opted to err on the side of safety with our front page illustration this time, after the unfortunate gaffe in the last issue. "Are we still in lockdown?" the squirrel asked, to which the owl replied no. Sadly he hadn't been keeping up with the news, because by the time we were sending the newsletters out, we were plunged into local lockdown. Damn! Which segued into national lockdown. Double damn!! (In a witty comment online, someone said if the rule of nature is survival of the fittest, why close the gyms?)

Once again, we're bemused by the whole Black Friday thing, as it relates to business. Oooh, look, 47% off a hard drive caddy!!! (Sorry, but no matter how many exclamation marks we throw at it, it's just not that interesting). Why does every retailer have this compulsion to 'honour' (& we use the term very loosely) Black Friday?

Steve, meanwhile, is indulging in a nostalgia-fest, building himself a computer with parts that were going obsolete when Take That were No.1 the first time around. He's acquired a serial mouse (& for the uninitiated, this is not a particularly vicious mouse with homicidal tendencies) & a beige monitor the approximate size of a JCB. Remember when everything IT was beige? Now you get 'smouldering black' & other such nonsense.

Being as we've lurched from lockdown to lockdown (firebreak, circuit break, psychotic break, whatever), there's not a lot to report by way of news at Aspect. No Xmas party, for sure (who wants to drink corporation pop & go home at 6pm?), so here's last year's instead! (You'll note that with the exception of Nikki, we do not do hats ...)



As we wrap this up for another year, it's hard to even know what to wish you. So we shall simply say ... we wish you whatever you wish for yourselves.

The Last Laugh



"Sorry, your password must contain a capital letter, two numbers, a symbol, an inspiring message, a spell, a gang sign, a hieroglyph and the blood of a virgin"



The Aspect Newsletter Issue 49 - Christmas 2020



And may all your Christmases be Green

As we stare the end of 2020 in the (masked) face, we can't help but reflect that it's been a very strange old year and one we'll be more than happy to say goodbye to. It took an effort of will to change the clocks in October and endure an extra hour of it. But all we can do is keep adjusting to whatever is the New Normal in any given week (a big ask for those who had barely a nodding acquaintance with normality before), and plod on till it's all past. Thank goodness there's no other economic upheavals on the horizon. Oh wait ...

So that's 2020. Great if you're referring to the quality of your eyesight (no more Dominic Cummings jokes, please), a complete write-off otherwise.

Do we have a Covid-themed Christmas story? No we emphatically do not. We're going with the other major topic *du jour* - climate change. Santa and his elves have gone green this Christmas (yes, they're ba-a-aack!) And the newsletter itself is, as always, fully recyclable. Give it six weeks, and it'll be back as toilet paper. We'd be grateful if you didn't try to cut out the middle man though. But to reiterate, Santa and his elves will not be conspicuously practising social distancing, wearing masks or hand sanitising. It's a fairy story, not a public health broadcast. All the previous stories are on the website for a limited period as usual.

In a similarly upbeat vein, the one liners from the last issue were a big hit, so we're going with some more of those. Does that leave much room for techie bits? Not really. But after the year you've had, we don't see you being too upset. Tell you what - we'll harangue you mercilessly with technical stuff next year, all right?

Be well, be safe and have the best Christmas you can. x

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Merry Christmas!



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AspectBC FAQs

Rather than a question and answer to begin, we have an observation....

In my Outlook, random items were appearing in an Archive folder when I'd not archived them. Admittedly, the Archive button lives next to the Delete button, but I still didn't think I'd hit it. Confusingly though, what was in there was definitely stuff I didn't want. Did I really just have fumble fingers?

The lightbulb moment came one Monday, when I realised what was in there were emails I'd deleted from my *phone* over the weekend. With that clue, it all fell into place. I thought left swiping them was deleting them, but no. My phone Settings had a left swipe set to archive the email, not delete it. Ah, as they say, ha!

I was browsing a web page and suddenly it's gone full screen. I've got no cross to close it, I haven't got a Start button or a toolbar anymore. Help!

You can toggle in and out of full screen mode with the F11 key. If you are completely stuck, though, [Shift]+[Esc] will close your browser altogether.

Why doesn't my wireless keyboard have lights for Caps Lock, Num Lock and Scroll Lock?

To save battery life. If it sounds as though we should've finished with "boom! boom!", then sorry - that really is why. It used to be possible to have eg. 'Caps Lock On' displayed on the screen, but Windows 10 put the kibosh on that. What to do? Well you can have an audible alert when you press one of those keys, but it won't tell you which one, nor whether you've just turned it on or off. (And let's face it, if you're hearing-impaired, it's less than helpful). You can also choose to have a flash appear on-screen, but again, you'll not be given any indication of what exactly you just did to cause it.

If all this is driving you nuts, there is a free piece of software called *TrayStatus* which will put an indicator down by the clock on your screen.



We'd love to hear your comments and feedback.
Just email:
newsletter@aspectbc.co.uk

(Recent issues are on the website if you missed them).

Working From Home

It's even made it into the Oxford English Dictionary this year - WFH is officially a 'thing'. For those of us consigned to the kitchen or dining-room table, trying to stop the cat walking across the keyboard, it probably won't ever be a substitute for the office (can we spell 'ergonomic', children?), but for some it was a lifestyle choice they don't plan to deviate from.



Like it or loathe it, WFH as a widespread concept is with us to stay. So luckily, we have lots of ways to keep you connected and keep you functioning as if you were still in the office. Need to still get your calls? At the simplest, we can divert calls to your mobile. Or how about looking at a telecoms system that lets your mobile *be* your office phone, so you can transfer calls to other extensions (mobiles), do messaging between staff members and even video conferencing, without the need for Teams or Zoom (two more terms that have taken on a life of their own this year).

We can help you with secure connection to your office systems too, emphasis on *secure*. From VPN tunnels through your office router to third party devices that can support hundreds of connections, we can offer something to suit all sizes of business. (Where we might struggle, however, is to offer you a laptop. In October, we were seeing stocks being quoted as due in March. *March!!....* And don't get us started on the ridiculous pricing.)

The big proviso in WFH is broadband. If it's not good, either at your home or your office, you're not likely to have a happy experience. We've said it before, but if you can work wired rather than wirelessly at home, you will find the performance to be better. But we appreciate that, certainly during full lockdown, there could be two or three of you all trying to work in different rooms at the same time. You may have to do rock-paper-scissors to see who gets the wired connection to the router on any given day. *"I've got a Teams meeting!!" ... "Yes, but I have to run Payroll!!!"*

We all hope we don't have to endure another lockdown, but WFH is about much more than that. It's being able to stay home when you have a sick child to look after and you can't afford time off. It's being able to work despite there being two feet of snow outside. It's for days when, for whatever reason, you're not fit to travel to work but you could still do *something*. It's for reducing your carbon footprint. In a word, it is *flexibility*.

Since pre-lockdown in March, we've helped a lot of clients set up working from home. Recognising it wasn't going to be a flash in the pan, we've continued to investigate and assess different solutions for different scenarios and we're confident we will have a solution for you.

The Helpdesk of HORROR...

♪ Let it doh! Let it doh! Let it doh!! ♪



"Do you have a network outage at the moment?"
"Which of our offices are you in?"
"We're actually contractors."
"OK, but where are you?"
"I think our head office is in Miami?"
"Yes, fine, but where, exactly, are you?"
"Oh. I don't know that. Let me put you on hold ..."

"Your software has crashed our systems!!!"
"I'm sorry to hear that, that's awful. Can you tell me where you loaded it?"
"I put the disk down on top of my computer and the whole system went down!!"
"Sorry, you put it down on *top* of the computer?"
"Yes, and it made it crash!!"

"I can't get into my voicemail!!!"
[sounds of someone stabbing repeatedly at their touchscreen ... BAP-BAP-BAP!!]
"Let me remote into your phone ..."
[BAP-BAP-BAP!!]
"Sir, this is your voicemail. See, the title saying 'voicemail' and the play buttons?"
"Oh. I fixed it!!!"

"Yes, I don't know if you remember me - you came out to my house a month ago, to install my printer?"
"Yes, I do."
"Ah, well the store had to re-format the computer, and I need the printer installed again."
"Oh. OK, well I could come out ..."
"Yeah, thing is, I don't want to pay you. I was hoping you'd do it for free."
"Well if it's just the printer, I could maybe do tomorrow, possibly the day after, but I'm not sure."
"No, tomorrow is too late. Can't you come tonight?"
"Gratis?"
"Yes."
"No."

"I don't know how you people got my email address, but I want you to remove me from your lists immediately!!!"
"Of course. If you'll give me your name or email address ..."
"I don't want you to have it!"
"I understand, but if you don't tell me your name or email address, how will I find you to delete them?"
"Well I don't know. Doesn't it come up on caller display or something?"

"This weblink isn't working."
"OK, to clarify, does nothing happen, or do you get a blank page open up, or an error message?"
"It doesn't work. I click on it and it doesn't work."
"All right, so which browser are you using?"
"Which what?"
"Web browser. Like Chrome, Firefox, Internet Explorer, Edge ..."
"I don't know. I'm accessing it like I always do."
"OK, let's try this - when you access this site, do you normally click an icon on the desktop, or launch your browser and type in the website address?"
"I just do it the way I always do it!!!!"
"Yes, I understand that, but I'm just trying to clarify *how* you do it. Can you describe what you see at the bottom of ..."
"Oh never mind, I'll figure it out myself!!!"

Get backup caaaaaaalm

Going back to the WFH concept on page 2, this might be (yet another) opportune moment to discuss backups. We know you all understand the importance of backups (just nod), but if lockdown showed us anything, it was that relying on someone physically changing disks or tapes every day can be a problem when that person isn't there. (Well OK, lockdown also showed us that about 0.5% of people who don joggers of a morning plan to jog, that banana bread is the work of the devil, and that dining room chairs are meant to be sat on for the duration of a meal and not a minute longer).

Sorry, where were we? Oh yes, backups. Well if you backup to the Cloud, the backup will happen if you're there, and it'll happen if you're not. Sorted. Yes, we do all hope lockdowns are behind us, but as with WFH, this isn't about protracted, enforced absence from work. It's about the fact that the work model is changing generally and it's about giving you the flexibility (yep, that word again) to embrace it.

Vassilly's Xmas Blog



Fri 2 Oct

Storm ... Alex? How is we get back to A? Last one is Frances, no? Am I sleep through rest of alphabet?

Tues 20 Oct

So we is go back into lockdown. ☹ Sigh. No tricking or treating, peoples!! Where am I get chocolate from now? (Payrolls lady is suggest maybe I am try buying it. Pff!! Where is fun in that?) I am tell IT Boss Man I am work from home. He is ask why I am persist in calling what I do 'work'. But what else is it then? He say he is never find word that is suitable. And most is not polite to write down.

Fri 23 Oct

Now it is come to it, I am tell IT Boss Man I am maybe have problem with working from home. He say this is wrong attitude. Is no problems. Is only opportunities. Ah. OK. Then I am take opportunity to ask for computermabob, because I am not have one. He is nod. Really!! I am get one?! He say no. He is nod because I am right. It is problem.

Tues 27 Oct

Payrolls lady is confirm I am not get computermabob, but I am full of keeness to be helping, so she say maybe I can answer phone. But she say I must speak proper. (I am not understand. I am speak English perfect like what it is wrote. Hmph).

Wed 28 Oct

Wow. Peoples, this phone answering is confusing. How many Amazon Prime memberships is Aspects have? And how is nice man know I am have accident that is not my fault? Is not by speaking to Payrolls lady, this is for sure. I am full of interests to have nice chat with man, but other call is come in. Peoples! Aspects broadband is being cut off!! I am panic and drop phone, and when I am pick it up, they is gone! Oh no!! I am phone Payrolls lady, but she say is just scam by bad peoples to make you pay monies. Broadband is not really get cut off. Ohhhh. That is naughty. OK, I think I am get hang of this now and I am being super alert to scams.

Thurs 29 Oct

Maybe I am not get hang of this. Payrolls lady say supplier who is call yesterday about end of month account is very nice man, and is not deserve to be called - and she is quote - despicable, bottom-feeding scum.

Mon 9 Nov

Out of lockdown and back to offices! I am tell IT Boss Man I am feel little bit useless at home but he say this is perfectly natural. He say is because I am very much useless in office too. Telecommmmms Boss Man say I am go cabling with him this week, so I am full of excites. This is my raisin eater, what I am join Aspects to do!! (See? I am speak foreign lingos as good as English!!) He is ask what is odds I am being ready for 6am tomorrow. Serious? Like chances that Donald is tweet I LOST!! (Oh subject of this, is all very odd, no? Is like if I am ring lottery peoples to say winning numbers they is read out is wrong and is really my numbers that is win).

Wed 25 Nov

IT Boss Man is have cables job too, but he say I am not go. He say is 600 mile round trip, which is take very long time anyways, and even longer if he is give in to urge to stop and bounce my head off tarmac every few miles. (I think this is go back to time we is go to Dolg .. Dogl.. north Wales together. So OK, maybe I am ask once or twice if we is there yet. OK, maybe dozen times. Hundred times, tops. Is long way, peoples, and this is natural question!!)

Tues 1 Dec

IT Boss Man's birthday. He is buy jam doughnuts. (See? He is like me really). Is very busy day today, with many calls, so we is need doughnuts to keep strength up. Sergei is ask Payrolls lady if is OK to use office PC to do present shopping for Christmassabobs? He say is hard to be wearing mask in shops, because glasses is steam up. (Yesterday he is get cross when person in queue in front of him is not move for 15 minutes. Lady behind him is explain is not person. Is lollipop sign that say to keep 2 metres apart). Payrolls lady say OK, but not to be buying everything from Amazon. We say no, we is use Volga. Is like Amazon, but much less efficient.

Thurs 3 Dec

Radiator in office is go pffff!! I am ask why is heaters always break when weather is cold? Payrolls lady say heaters is not break when weather is warm because they is not on.

Fri 4 Dec

Is time to end another blog, peoples, and end difficult year for everyones. I am leave you with wise old proverb from Meerkovo:- when life is bring you nothing but weasels, it sucks. (What? You are expect helpful and uplifting?)

Merry Christmassabobs loyal fans!

A CLEAN HOUSE IS THE SIGN OF A BROKEN COMPUTER

Programming today is a race between software engineers striving to build bigger and better idiot-proof programs, and the Universe trying to produce bigger and better idiots. So far, the Universe is winning.

-Rich Cook

The problem with quotes on the internet is you can never be sure they're authentic.

- Abraham Lincoln

FAILURE IS NOT AN OPTION

It comes bundled with the software

A computer once beat me at chess, but it was no match for me at kick-boxing.

- Emo Philips

Programmer Logic

"Can you go to the shop and get a bottle of milk? If they've got eggs, get six."

So I come back with six bottles of milk, and she asks why.

"Duh, BECAUSE THEY HAD EGGS!"

CAPS LOCK: Preventing login since 1980

"My kids never call."

"Oh, do what I do. Change the Netflix password and ignore their texts."

He's making a list, he's checking it twice ...

After last year, Santa ran out of movies with place names to tick off on his world tour, so this year, to keep the elves occupied, he's got them awarding themselves points if the presents they pluck out of the sack go to children whose names are song titles. Some notes/rules:

- All the songs have to be just the first name(s). No surnames, no extraneous words (so we're not *Making Plans For Nigel* or *Living Next Door To Alice*, OK?)
- We've also tried to choose song titles that really *are* children's names, so while Frankie Laine did have a song called *Jezebel*, we think it unlikely anyone would make their child live up to a name like that. Then again, these days who knows what goes through parents' minds when naming their poor unfortunate offspring?
- We've gone for the original recordings of these songs, which may not be the version you're most familiar with.



How will you do against the lists we came up with? We've given you the number of letters and who sang them. And no, we're not perpetuating any of that blue for boys and pink for girls nonsense. Girls are green and boys are beige! Yes, there are many more songs about girls compared to boys - we'll leave you to debate the reasons for that over your Christmas dinner.

Answers on the website (follow the link on the newsletter page).

Girls

- | | | | | |
|--|---|---------------------------------------|--|--|
| 1. A _____
<i>Elvis Costello</i> | 2. A _____
<i>The Rolling Stones</i> | 3. B _____
<i>The Four Tops</i> | 4. B _____
<i>Michael Jackson</i> | 5. C _____
<i>Gilbert O'Sullivan*</i> |
| 6. C _____
<i>Simon & Garfunkel</i> | 7. C _____
<i>Status Quo</i> | 8. D _____
<i>Paul Anka</i> | 9. D _____
<i>10 CC</i> | 10. D _____
<i>The Singing Nun**</i> |
| 11. D _____
<i>Tom Jones</i> | 12. E _____
<i>Barry Ryan</i> | 13. G _____
<i>Laura Branigan</i> | 14. H _____
<i>Bobby Goldsboro</i> | 15. I _____
<i>Goo Goo Dolls</i> |
| 16. J _____
<i>Dolly Parton</i> | 17. J _____
<i>Scott Walker</i> | 18. K _____
<i>Marillion</i> | 19. L _____
<i>Derek & The Dominoes</i> | 20. L _____
<i>The Kinks</i> |
| 21. L _____
<i>Kenny Rogers</i> | 22. M _____
<i>Blondie</i> | 23. M _____
<i>Barry Manilow</i> | 24. M _____
<i>Beatles</i> | 25. N _____
<i>Elton John</i> |
| 26. P _____
<i>Buddy Holly</i> | 27. R _____
<i>Police</i> | 28. R _____
<i>Fleetwood Mac</i> | 29. R _____
<i>Kaiser Chiefs</i> | 30. R _____
<i>Toto</i> |
| 31. S _____
<i>John Travolta</i> | 32. S _____
<i>Four Seasons</i> | 33. T _____
<i>Debbie Reynolds</i> | 34. V _____
<i>Zutons</i> | 35. V _____
<i>Elvis Costello</i> |

Boys

- | | | | | | |
|---|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---|--|---------------------------------|
| 1. A _____
<i>Brotherhood of Man</i> | 2. A _____
<i>Cilla Black</i> | 3. B _____
<i>Michael Jackson</i> | 4. C _____
<i>China Crisis</i> | 5. D _____
<i>Elton John</i> | 6. D _____
<i>Blondie</i> |
| 7. E _____
<i>Benny Hill</i> | 8. F _____
<i>ABBA</i> | 9. F _____
<i>Sister Sledge</i> | 10. G _____
<i>Dexy's Midnight Runners</i> | 11. H _____
<i>Catherine Howe</i> | 12. J _____
<i>Pearl Jam</i> |
| 13. L _____
<i>Suzanne Vega</i> | 14. M _____
<i>Toni Basil</i> | 15. R _____
<i>Mr Big</i> | 16. S _____
<i>Eminem</i> | 17. S _____
<i>Olivia Newton-John</i> | 18. T _____
<i>Twinkle</i> |
| 19. V _____
<i>Don McLean</i> | | | | | |

* Points deducted if you spell it wrong!

** No, we are not making this up. There really was a Singing Nun.



Dai Trying, Santa's Chief Elf, cast his eye round the table and mentally girded his loins. This was going to be a tricky meeting, so it was, and no mistake. He banged his gavel on the desk and cleared his throat.

"Right then, boyos, I call this meeting to order. We've got a fair bit to get through, look you, so let's get to it. First up, a reading of the minutes from the last meeting...." He looked over his glasses at Jones the Calligraphy who was taking notes in intricate and painstaking detail.

"... to order." Jones the Calligraphy added some embellishment to the 'r' before becoming aware that everyone was looking at him. "What?"

Dai sighed. "You write a bee-yootiful hand, so you do bach, but I'm curious why you applied for the job."

Jones the Calligraphy scratched his beard. "I heard you were short-handed."

"No-ooo, I'm pretty sure we wanted someone who could take shorthand. But I have to say, your minutes are a thing of wonder, so they are." *Pity they turn out to be weeks rather than minutes*, he thought. "Never mind, let's skip reading the minutes. There's important business to attend to by here, see? It's been pointed out by concerned parties", he inclined his head towards Frosty the Snowman, who was looking decidedly melty round the edges, "that we need to reduce our carbon footprint." He paused, awaiting the inevitable. *And three... two...*

"Oh, now I say," interjected Santa. "I defy anyone to get down some of those sooty chimneys without picking up a bit of dust..."

... there we go. "... and I admit my boots are a little on the large side, but I don't exactly trample it into the carpet..."

"Yes, not quite what I was meaning, your Jollyness," Dai interrupted. "No, what I'm after saying is that we need to try to be more green, but. More environmentally friendly, isn't it? Now we've had a bunch of these scientist boyos looking into ways we can improve, and they've come up with this here list."

He took a deep breath.



"Right then, if we can look at making the reindeer more green first..."

"Not... not the nose!" gasped Santa.

"No, no. Rudolph's fine. It's actually the... er... other end that's the problem, as it were." Dai tugged at his collar and wished it wasn't his turn to be chair. Jones the Calligraphy, meanwhile, dipped his pen in the inkpot again and began tracing a delicate *footprint*.

"Look you, what I'm trying to say is that we need to think about our output!" declared Dai.

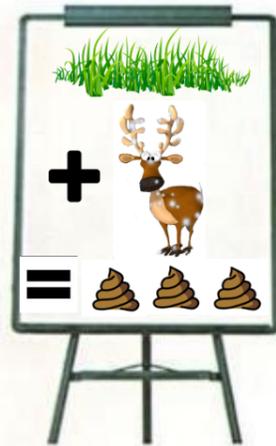
Jones the Sack raised a hand. "I thought productivity was up?"

"Oh, it is, lad, it is. And I'm not talking about off the production line either, that's the very problem," said Dai flatly. "See now, let me hand over to Jones the Pooper Scooper to brief you."

As Dai's meaning dawned, everyone round the table recoiled a little bit, except Jones the Pooper Scooper who was now in his element. *(A visual, we'd suggest, it's best not to linger over)*.

Jones the Pooper Scooper walked around to a chart on an easel in the corner and flipped the front sheet back.

Some of the younger elves snorted, but most of the audience were speechless.



"Grass," Jones the Pooper Scooper began, thumping the top of the chart with a wooden pointer, "goes in. Poop," he smacked the bottom of the chart, "comes out. I thank you."

He walked back to his seat and sat down, leaving most everyone still staring open-mouthed at the graphic tableau on the chart.

"Well," said Dai eventually. "Duw. That was a very... brief... briefing, wasn't it, but? Mind, they do say a picture paints a thousand words." He looked at the chart again. Mostly it painted one. Write large. "Okaaaay, so what the lad may have skated over..." he winced at the turn of phrase "... er... skimmed over... No!" He took a deep breath. "Look you, in point of fact, the motion in front of us..." several elves sniggered and Dai banged his head off the table a couple of times. "Duw, duw, duw. Let's all just settle down, right? What I mean to say is that we have ourselves a bit of a problem with emissions, see? Methane emissions, if I have to be particular, and let me tell you, lads, I'd considerably rather not. But those clever scientist boyos have worked out what's caused the hole in the ozone layer at the North Pole, and it's a tragedy so it is, because it turns out it's Dancer, Prancer, Donner, Blitzen, Comet, Vixen, Cupid, Dasher and Rudolph!" *Especially Comet*, thought Dai. *If you'd seen him that first week he arrived, soaring through the sky with that blazing trail behind him. Full of beans, he was... Course, we took them off the menu after that, and you have to say that Frosty's been a sight more careful with his matches since too.*

"So the thing is, see, we need to look at a change of diet for them."

"What, like they have to go vegetarian?" asked Jones the Ribbon (who may have had a room temperature IQ, but he did tie a beautiful bow).

"They're already vegetarian, bach. No, apparently we need to get them eating..." he looked at his notes and his eyebrows rose... "seaweed?" He scratched his head and stared out the window, where a brisk north wind tossed a few extra inches of snow onto the bank against the stable wall.

"Any ideas lads?"

Jones the Sack raised a hand. "I propose we think about it now in a minute."

"Capital. We'll do that. Write that down."

Jones the Calligraphy, however, was still working hard on his *productivity*.



"Right, next on the agenda. Single use plastics. We've got to cut them right out, see?"

"Ah," nodded Santa, "now there I have to agree. When I ventured to change children's habits some years back... you remember Dai?" *(See Santa Claus and the Copper Crisis - 2013)*.

"I do. I really do." *I still come out in a cold sweat sometimes in the dead of night.*

"Yes, so I was all for getting back to proper toys that last a lifetime," Santa smiled in reminiscence. "None of these plastic things that you open up and then throw away by Christmas night, or that break in five minutes. No! Things you can hand down to your children. Your grand..."

"Yes, yes. Durable, got it. But in point of fact, while that's an admirable aim, and it is, for sure, it's not actually what single use plastic means."

"No?"

"No, your Jollyness. It's about things you can't refill. Plastic cups, bags, bottles, that manner of thing."

"So my toy sack is good? I refill it every year you know."

"I do know. And your toy sack is the very epitome of sustainability, so it is."

"Good, good.... Oh, but what about that Tupperware box I keep mince pies in?" he asked worriedly. "It's plastic."

"But reusable. You don't throw it out when you've eaten the pies, do you? It's things you throw away when you've finished with them that we're talking about, see?"

"Ah. Right, I see."

"So what we need to..."

"Oh! Oh! What about plastic drinking straws?! They'd be bad, wouldn't they?" Dai could see the rest of the day disappearing into an endless round of *Name The Plastic*. He'd have to bring out the big guns. This was a job for... Management Speak!

"SO I PROPOSE," he said loudly, to quell any other interruptions, "we assemble a steering committee... (no that is not Jones the Sleigh," he said in a sharp aside to Santa, who could be guaranteed to seize the wrong end of any given stick with both hands), "... to gather reports on domestic practices *vis-à-vis* plastics usage, and, *ipso facto*, present us with a policy on sustainability. Yes," he said, holding up a hand, "I know it means thinking outside the box, so I'll touch base with a few of you later and we'll aim for some blue sky thinking, OK? Now, are we all singing from the same hymn sheet, hmmm?"

There was utter, bamboozled, silence. And into it, while Jones the Calligraphy laboriously created *Methane*, he dropped the bombshell.



"So. Moving on. It's been suggested that... uh... where possible, we... er... try to fly..." he braced himself "... less."

Uproar. "Less?!!!" "We only fly once a year!!!" "What's less than one? It's nothing! It's no-fly!!!" "The children!! Oh Gawd, will nobody think of the children?!!!!!"

Dai pounded the desk with his gavel. "Order! Order!!! For the love of Croft Original, **SHUT UP!!!!**"

The furor subsided into anxious mutterings. Dai smacked his gavel a few more times till there was silence.

"Thank you. Now there's no point saying this isn't a right old conundrum, because it is, and there's the fact of it." A hand rose at the end of the table. "Yes... ummm...?"

(Who's that?) he hissed in an aside to Jones the Sack.

"Griffiths the IT Support," he whispered back.

"We have IT Support?" Dai shook his head. "Who knew?"

"Yes lad? What have you got to say?" Griffiths the IT Support took his glasses off and rubbed the indentations on the bridge of his nose.

"Well, looking at this logically, from a scientific standpoint, see..."

"Ah, if I could maybe interrupt you now for a minute?" said Dai. "If you're going to be after using long words and talking scientific stuff, then out of consideration for Jones the Calligraphy here, I think you might need to condense this a bit, bach. Otherwise the poor lad'll be scribing away till a week Tuesday. So let's keep it simple, but. You're saying we need to do what, exactly?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing?"

"Nothing. We've already done it."

"We've... what?"

"Already done it," nodded Griffiths the IT Support. "Nothing more to do."

Dai looked at him, nonplussed. "If it helps," offered Jones the Calligraphy, raising a timid hand, "I've no plans till Sunday?"

"Well said, lad, that's uncommonly decent of you. There you go, then," said Dai, turning back to Griffiths the IT Support, "I think we can manage the slightly longer version."

Griffiths the IT Support leaned back in his chair. "Wellllll, as I see it," he said, "we visit every house in the whole world in one night, right?"

"Except for the ones with no kiddies," pointed out Jones the Ribbon.

"Or with different beliefs," added Jones the Sack.

"Yeah, like getting your presents on *New Year's Day*," said Jones the Sleigh, twirling his index finger by his temple. "Weeeee-ird."

"Or getting *coal*," said Jones the Pooper Scooper in disbelief. "Who gives coal as a present?"

"Oh no, I don't think that's a Christmas present, I think that's more of a Hogmanay thing," pointed out Santa. "You see it goes back to..."

"**A-n-y-w-a-y**," Griffiths the IT Support raised his voice over the babble, "the point is, see, that it's impossible. Whole world in one night? Not possible." Dai scratched his head.

"But... we do it. Every year."

"**Ex-actly!**" Griffiths the IT Support pointed a finger at him. "What do you mean, 'exactly'?" asked Dai, crossly. *And that's IT Support all over*, he thought. *You feel stupider coming out of the conversation than you were going in.*

"No, no, no, but listen," said Griffiths the IT Support urgently. "You said we should try to fly less 'where possible'. *Where. Possible.* Well we're not flying at all where it's possible, right? Only where it's *im*-possible. So that's it, isn't it, see? We should just carry on as we are." He nodded in satisfaction.

Dai blinked. "Well now. Well." He looked at the other elves who were in various stages of befuddlement as they tried to wrap their heads around this. Except for Jones the Calligraphy, who was busy assembling the *steering committee*.



"I think," said Dai, ticking items off his agenda, "we've cracked it, lads." *Talked about everything, achieved almost nothing. Pretty much a classic meeting.* "All that's left, look you, is to have a name for all these new directives, but. Something we can get behind. Let's throw out some watchwords, boyos!"

"Green!" shouted Jones the Sack. "Recycling!" proposed Frosty. "Enviren... envirnium... green!!!"

beamed Jones the Ribbon.

He tries, so he does, sighed Dai, as he translated into *environmentally-friendly*. "Tupperware!!!" offered Santa, evidently still playing *Name the Plastic*.

"Air travel!!!" from Jones the Sleigh.

Dai looked down at his scribbles. He rolled his eyes, crumpled the sheet and tossed it in the bin. *Well there's daft I am*, he thought. *As if they'd just fall into some kind of snappy acronym we could get behind....*

G... R... E... T... A...