

A Christmas Storygame

By Adam Robichaud

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The Pitch

A **Christmas Storygame** is a holiday-themed coming-of-age story game for 2-5 people that recreates the childhood Christmases of yesteryear in the narrative voice of your adult self.

The Setting

A **Christmas Storygame** takes place in the Christmases of yesteryear—meaning you're going to tell a story set in your collective childhoods. As such, you should sit down and discuss what the Holidays were like growing up for each of you individually. Pay close attention to the parts of your story that you have in common, and note things that sound important to the other people at the table. These are the elements of the story that you want to inject into your game to bring it life.

Set this game in a moderately accurate portrayal of a place most of you have grown up. If there's a wide gap in the affluence of your respective upbringings, err on the side of humility.

If someone at the table does not celebrate Christmas and wants to participate, *make room for them*. Ask them what they did during the holidays, and note their experiences. Their stories are just as valuable to this coming of age tale as anyone's. The only holiday truth in this game is: you're going to exchange gifts on Christmas day.

How to Play

Grab a handful of your closest friends, some spiked eggnog, your ugliest holiday-themed sweaters, and a printout of this document (maybe a pencil and some paper, too). Take some time to familiarize yourself with the rules, and get down to telling the made-for-TV movie version of your childhood holiday experience!



How to Play (continued)

You are going to communally narrate the days leading up to your protagonist's self described "best Christmas ever". You're going to tell this story from the perspective of this child, as remembered (fondly or otherwise) by their adult self.

This game is (obviously) inspired by the classic movie **A Christmas Story**, but is designed to take liberties with the content so you can shape it to whatever you like. Each player will embody a single **Rite of Passage** the protagonist will undergo before the story is through, and help the other players achieve their embodied rites as well.

Instead of each player at the table controlling a single protagonist, you'll all communally take turns controlling a single protagonist as they progress through their story. All the other characters in the game come from a communal pool that you'll play as required. You'll start by creating the protagonist of your story via a Mad Lib **Letter to Santa**.

When that's complete, you'll play through some introduction scenes to establish key characters in the story (your immediate family, your friends, teachers, etc), and foreshadow the things that are going to happen throughout the story (the **Rites of Passage** this story is about).

Then you'll take turns framing and narrating **Vignettes** from the first person past-tense perspective of the protagonist's adult self. Other players will take up the mantle of the other characters in the story, and you'll stumble your way through the holidays.

When all the Rites of Passage have been played out, Christmas will come. You'll communally narrate Christmas day, and reflect on all the events that transpired, polish off your eggnog, and call it a day.

Non-Protagonist Character Creation

Character creation is meant to be simple: Establish the following about the character: What does the protagonist call them? How are they related to the protagonist? What's a defining quirk of their personality? What do they want for Christmas (which doesn't have to be a thing)?

Think: (**name**), (**relationship**), who (**quirk**), and wants (**gift**).

Then play them to that archetype!

Introduction

Let's get down to business. Once everyone's settled, it's time to create your protagonist. Grab the **Letter to Santa**, and read it out to your fellow players, asking for input on each point until the letter is complete. Don't go too crazy defining aspects of the protagonist—let everyone create their own image of what they look like in their heads.

Next, we're going to play through a few **vignettes** together to warm up.

The *first vignette* on the docket is an introduction to the protagonist. Show them in a store, or on the street, or on the internet, pining over the thing that tops their wishlist. Hammer down this thing in exquisite detail. Make it clear why the character wants it, and that they'll do whatever they can to get it.

The *second vignette* should be an introduction to the protagonist's family. Frame a scene in the family's home with everybody present. Go around the table having everyone introduce a member of the family (for two player games, consider going around twice). Refer to the section on **Character Creation** when making members of the family.

Finally, take turns framing scenes where you establish a few friends and your school teacher. During these scenes, establish the **Rite of Passage** you're going to be pursuing for your character in this game.

Vignettes

A Christmas Storygame is told in units of vignettes. These are short scenes framed to highlight specific moments in the protagonist's life, and holiday experience. Keep the following in mind when setting up a vignette:

- Have the main character present.
- Make some reference to Christmas; the holiday season; or winter—whether that's central to the scene or not is up to you.
- Shine a light on what it's like to grow up.

This is a story about the **protagonist**, and nobody else. Think of everyone else as an accessory to that story.

Vignettes (continued)

Each vignette is composed of the following pieces:

- **The Cast:** whoever is present during this vignette.
- **The Set:** the location this vignette takes place in.
- **The Vignette:** the subject of the vignette (i.e. what's happening in the scene)
- **The Rite of Passage:** (optional) if it's appropriate to foreshadow or act out the protagonist undergoing a rite of passage in this vignette, do so.
- **The Hunt:** (optional) if at all possible, you should try and incorporate the protagonist's hunt for their coveted wishlist topper—but don't shoehorn it into a scene unless it fits naturally.

Play each vignette until the subject of the vignette has been exhausted, or it feels natural to stop. A list of example vignette subjects has been provided to help jump-start your story. Refer to it whenever your turn is coming up, and work towards incorporating as many existing elements of the story as possible: tight fiction is good fiction!

Try and feature the **Rite of Passage** you're representing in the story at least twice before bringing it to a head. Use foreshadowing whenever possible to hint that this thing is coming.

Example: if it's your first kiss, mention the fact that you have a girl in your class you think is pretty, or that there's a boy in your class who is super clingy, and you don't know why. Maybe have another scene where you exchange presents at a Christmas party. Then, frame the scene where the kiss happens.

Remember: you're nine in this story—react appropriately. Keep it wholesome, and PG!

When you've narrated your character undergoing your rite of passage, you're done controlling the protagonist in this story (until Christmas). Once everybody has narrated their rite of passage, move on to **The Epilogue**.

The Epilogue

It's Christmas Day (or Eve, if you're French)! Gather with your family around the tree (or whatever place you would exchange gifts), and do your gift exchange!

Take turns describing things your family gets—nothing at this point should be what the protagonist was hoping for. When you've all had a good laugh reminiscing about the odd gifts these people exchange, it's time to open that big gift from Santa.

This is the big one—the one your protagonist has been hoping for. Communally decide the following:

- How does the present become known to them?
- Who got it for them?
- Why did that person get it for them?

Take turns winding down the story with the protagonist enjoying their gift, the family enjoying their holiday feast, maybe one last bit of misfortune that befalls the family (a burnt turkey, a fallen icicle, a covert lump of coal...), and wind down with a scene in bed, where each player expresses the protagonist closing thoughts on the rites of passage they've undergone, and how this was—in fact—the best Christmas ever.

The End

About this Game

A Christmas Storygame was written & produced by Adam Robichaud. If you liked this game, consider taking a look at **Poutine**—*a story game about love, regret, and delicious, delicious poutine*, set in rural Québec. They're very similar.

[<https://apo.calypti.ca/poutine>]

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Family & Friends

- Working parent
- Overbearing parent
- Absent parent
- Easy-going parent
- Idolized older sibling
- Despised older sibling
- Twin sibling
- Annoying younger sibling
- Fun younger sibling
- Free-spirited [Aunt/Uncle]
- Live-in grandparent
- Best friend
- Odd friend
- Class clown
- Popular kid
- Geeky kid
- The rich kid
- Apathetic teacher
- Enthusiastic teacher
- The old priest
- The hip, young
- The mall Santa
- The mall Santa's helpers

Sets

- The kitchen
- The living room
- Your bedroom
- Your sibling's bedroom
- Your parents' bedroom
- Your/your friend's yard
- The schoolyard
- Your commute to school
- The family car
- The church basement
- The school auditorium

Presents

- A dog/cat/pet
- A computer
- A gaming console
- That hot new game
- Your favorite book series
- Sports equipment
- Makeup
- A music album “for teens”
- This year's **BIG TOY**™
- An instrument/tool set
- An air gun

Vignettes

- Indulging in a hobby
- Hanging out with friends
- A school project
- Attending class
- Schoolyard antics
- Doing homework
- Getting in trouble
- A winter carnival
- A Christmas party
- A religious event
- Sledding, skiing, skating, etc
- Decking the halls
- Visiting relatives
- Christmas shopping
- Buying a Christmas tree
- Caroling
- Christmas baking
- Watching Christmas specials
- Playing on a huge snowbank
- A Christmas concert
- The Santa Claus parade
- Visiting a mall Santa
- Rehearsals
- Sneaking peeks at presents

Rites of Passage

- Your first brush with failure
- Being trusted with a big secret/responsibility
- Winning a prize (door prize, lottery, sport competition, etc)
- Discovering there's no Santa Claus
- Performing in the Christmas pageant
- Acting in a Holiday play
- Breaking a bone
- Your first “kiss”
- Getting in a fight
- Swearing in front of your parents
- Discovering your sexuality

Remember

- Have the main character present.
- Make some reference to Christmas; the holiday season; or winter—whether that's central to the scene or not is up to you.
- Shine a light on what it's like to grow up.
- This is a story about the protagonist. Focus on them!

Mad Lib Letter to Santa

Dear Santa,

My name is **(name)**, I'm 9 years old. You probably remember me from last year. I was the **(color)**-haired **(gender)** who was wearing the **(favorite color)** snowsuit. I have been **(qualifier)** good this year. I would like a(n) **(object of your desire)** for Christmas. My **(parent/guardian)** says I can't have one, because **(reason)**, but I need one because **(reason)**.

Signed,

(nickname)

Inspirations

The following media has inspired this game:

- A Christmas Story (1983)
- Home Alone (1990)
- A Charlie Brown Christmas (1965)
- Apocalypse World (2010)
- Poutine (2015)

Resources

- Font: **Scrubby** by Typodermic Fonts
- Font: **Times New Roman**
- Font: **Font Awesome** by fontawesome.io
- Font: **Muli** by Vernon Adams
- Image: **Red and Green Mistletoe Decoration** by Toni Cuenca
- Image: **Assorted Clothing Tags** by rawpixel.com

